SHORT STORIES

No. 799. Week Ending April 23, 1904. Price One Penny.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 799.] Week Ending April 23rd, 1904. [One Penny.

THIS SPLENDID NEW SERIAL HAS JUST BEGUN.

A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

Synopsis of First Chapters.

Mr. Theodore Racksole, American multi-millionaire, arrives at the Grand Babylon Hotel, and in consequence of an altercation with Jules, the all-important head waiter, he purchases the hotel for £400,000, with the intention of dismissing Jules from the staff.

Reginald Dimmock, English companion to Prince Aribert of Posen, dines the same evening with Racksole, who suspects that there is some sort of secret understanding between the young equerry and Jules.

The millionaire that night retires to bed very late, and is greatly surprised to see the waiter emerge from a room which he believes to be occupied by his daughter Nella.

Investigating the matter, Racksole finds that Dimmock is inhabiting the rooms, he having volunteered to change apartments with Nella, as a window of those she had intended to occupy had been broken by a stone flung from the outside. The millionaire accepts the explanation, although the circumstances of the case worry him considerably.

The next morning he learns that Miss Spencer, the bureau clerk, has left the hotel during the night, without giving any warning whatsoever.

Racksole dismisses Jules the first thing in the morning, forbidding him to enter the hotel again. Prince Aribert of Posen arrives, and Nella recognises him as a gentleman she has met in Paris as "Count Steenbock."

Dimmock is seen to drop dead in the quadrangle of the hotel. The cause of death is mysterious. More mysterious still is the way in which Dimmock's dead body disappears during the night—a coincidence being that Racksole discovers Jules in the hotel precincts.

The affair is kept very quiet, and does not leak out into the newspapers.

Prince Aribert is in great grief, and tells Nella that he has been informed that his nephew, Prince Eugen, the hereditary Grand Duke of Posen, who is almost of an age with himself, has disappeared in Ostend or the neighbourhood. Aribert imagines that Eugen is the victim of a plot, and decides to return to the Continent at once.

On the morning following the Prince's departure, Miss Spencer comes to the Grand Babylon disguised as the Baroness Zerlinski. Nella, suspicious of the woman's manner, watches her, and sees her take a note out of a cream puff that is served to her at lunch.

Suddenly the identity of the Baroness as Miss Spencer strikes Nella. Discovering that she has set out for Ostend, Nella decides to follow her, and tracks her to a house in that town. Boldly confronting Miss Spencer with a revolver, she learns various important facts about the Dimmock mystery; but by a trick, Miss Spencer eventually bests Nella.

The latter faints, and, awakening, finds herself on board a yacht.

Jules, otherwise Mr. Tom Jackson, is approaching her.

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

TENTH CHAPTER.
At Sea.

Nella's eyes flashed as she spoke, and the contempt in them added mightily to her beauty. Mr. Thomas Jackson, otherwise Jules, erstwhile head waiter at the Grand Babylon, considered himself a connoisseur in feminine loveliness, and the vision of Nella Racksole smote him like an exquisite blow.

"With pleasure," he replied. "I had forgotten that to prevent you from falling I had secured you to the chair." With a quick movement he unfastened the band. Nella stood up, quivering with fiery annoyance and scorn.

"Now," she said, fronting him, "what is the meaning of this?"

"You fainted," he replied imperturbably. "Perhaps you don't remember."

The man offered her a deck chair with a characteristic gesture. Nella was obliged to acknowledge, in spite of herself, that the fellow had distinction, an air of breeding. No one would have guessed that for twenty years he had been a hotel waiter. His long, lithe figure, and easy, careless carriage seemed to be the figure and carriage of an aristocrat, and his voice was quiet, restrained, and authoritative.

"That is nothing to do with my being carried off in this yacht of yours."

"It is not my yacht," he said, "but that is a minor detail. As to the more important matter, forgive me that I remind you that only a few hours ago you were threatening a lady in my house with a revolver."

"Then it was your house?"

"Why not? May I not possess a house?" He smiled.

"I must request you to put the yacht about at once, instantly, and take me back." She tried to speak firmly.

"Ah!" he said, "I'm afraid that's impossible. I didn't put out to sea with the intention of returning at once, instantly." In the last words he gave a faint imitation of her tone.

"When I do get back," she said, "when my father gets to know of this affair, it will be an exceedingly bad day for you, Mr. Jackson."

"But supposing your father doesn't hear of it——"

"What?"

"Supposing you never get back?"

"Do you mean, then, to have my murder on your conscience?"

"Talking of murder," he said, "you came very near to murdering my friend, Miss Spencer. At least, so she tells me."

"Is Miss Spencer on board?" Nella asked, seeing perhaps a faint ray of hope in the possible presence of a woman.

"Miss Spencer is not on board. There is no one on board except you and myself and a small crew—a very discreet crew, I may add."

"I will have nothing more to say to you. You must take your own course."

"Thanks for the permission," he said. "I will send you up some breakfast."

He went to the saloon stairs and whistled, and a negro boy appeared with a tray of chocolate. Nella took it, and, without the slightest hesitation, threw it overboard. Mr. Jackson walked away a few steps and then returned.

"You have spirit," he said, "and I admire spirit. It is a rare quality."

She made no reply.

"Why did you mix yourself up in my affairs at all?" he went on.

Again she made no reply, but the question set her thinking; why had she mixed herself up in this mysterious business? It was quite at variance with the usual methods of her gay and butterfly existence to meddle at all with serious things. Had she acted merely from a desire to see justice done and wickedness punished? Or was it the desire of adventure? Or was it, perhaps, the desire to be of service to his Serene Highness Prince Aribert?

"It is no fault of mine that you are in this fix," Jules continued. "I didn't bring you into it. You brought yourself into it. You and your father—you have been moving along at a pace which is rather too rapid."

"That remains to be seen," she put in coldly.

"It does," he admitted. "And I repeat that I can't help admiring you—that is, when you aren't interfering with my private affairs. That is a proceeding which I have never tolerated from anyone—not even from a millionaire, not even from a beautiful woman." He bowed. "I will tell you what I propose to do. I propose to escort you to a place of safety, and to keep you there till my operations are concluded and the possibility of interference entirely removed. You spoke just now of murder. What a crude notion that was of yours! It is only the amateur who practises murder——"

"What about Reginald Dimmock?" she interjected quickly.

He paused gravely.

"Reginald Dimmock," he repeated. "I had imagined his was a case of heart disease. Let me send you up some more chocolate. I'm sure you're hungry."

"I will starve before I touch your food," she said.

"Gallant creature!" he murmured, and his eyes roved over her face. Her superb, supercilious beauty overcame him. "Ah!" he said, "what a wife you would make!" He approached nearer to her. "You and I, Miss Racksole, your beauty and wealth and my brains—we could conquer the world. Few men are worthy of you, but I am one of the few. Listen! You might do worse. Marry me. I am a great man; I shall be greater. I adore you. Marry me, and I will save your life. All shall be well. I will begin again. The past shall be as though there had been no past."

"This is somewhat sudden—Jules," she said, with biting contempt.

"Did you expect me to be conventional?" he retorted. "I love you."

"Granted," she said, for the sake of the argument. "Then what will occur to your present wife?"

"My present wife?"

"Yes, Miss Spencer, as she is called."

"She told you I was her husband?"

'Incidentally, she did."

"She isn't."

"Perhaps she isn't. But, nevertheless, I think I won't marry you." Nella stood like a statue of scorn before him.

He went still nearer to her. "Give me a kiss, then; one kiss—I won't ask for more; one kiss from those lips and you shall go free. Men have ruined themselves for a kiss. I will."

'Coward!" she ejaculated.

"Coward!" he repeated. "Coward, am I? Then I'll be a coward, and you shall kiss me whether you will or not."

He put a hand on her shoulder. As she shrank back from his lustrous eyes with an involuntary scream, a figure sprang out of the dinghy a few feet away. With a single blow, neatly directed to Mr. Jackson's ear, Mr. Jackson was stretched senseless on the deck. Prince Aribert of Posen stood over him with a revolver. It was probably the greatest surprise of Mr. Jackson's whole life.

"Don't be alarmed," said the Prince to Nella; "my being here is the simplest thing in the world, and I will explain it as soon as I have finished with this fellow."

Nella could think of nothing to say, but she noticed the revolver in the Prince's hand.

"Why," she remarked, "that's my revolver."

"It is," he said, "and I will explain that, too."

The man at the wheel gave no heed whatever to the scene.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Court Pawnbroker.

"Mr. Sampson Levi wishes to see you, sir."

These words, spoken by a servant to Theodore Racksole, aroused the millionaire from a reverie which had been the reverse of pleasant. The fact was, and it is necessary

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to insist on it, that Mr. Racksole, owner of the Grand Babylon Hotel, was by no means in a state of self-satisfaction. A mystery had attached itself to his hotel, and with all his acumen and knowledge of things in general he was unable to solve that mystery. He laughed at the fruitless efforts of the police, but he could not honestly say that his own efforts had been less barren. The public was talking, for, after all, the disappearance of poor Dimmock's body had got noised abroad in an indirect sort of way, and Theodore Racksole did not like the idea of his impeccable hotel being the subject of sinister rumours. He wondered, grimly, what the public and the Sunday newspapers would say if they were aware of all the other phenomena, not yet common property; of Miss Spencer's disappearance, of Jules' strange visits, and of the non-arrival of Prince Eugen of Posen. Theodore Racksole had worried his brains without result. He had conducted an elaborate private investigation without result, and he had spent a certain amount of money without result. The police said that they had a clue; but Racksole remarked that it was always the business of the police to have a clue, that they seldom had more than a clue, and that a clue without some sequel to it was a pretty stupid business. The only sure thing in the whole affair was that a cloud rested over his hotel, his beautiful new toy, the finest of its kind. The cloud was not interfering with business, but, nevertheless, it was a cloud, and he fiercely resented its presence; perhaps it would be more correct to say that he fiercely resented his inability to dissipate it.

The millionaire from his hiding-place saw Rocco engaged in a mysterious occupation.

"Mr. Sampson Levi wishes to see you, sir," the servant repeated, having received no sign that his master had heard him.

"So I hear," said Racksole. "Does he want to see me personally?"

"He asked for you, sir."

"Perhaps it is Rocco he wants to see, about a menu or something of that kind?"

"I will inquire, sir," and the servant made a move to withdraw.

"Stop," Racksole commanded suddenly. "Desire Mr. Sampson Levi to step this way."

The great stockbroker of the "Kaffir Circus" entered with a simple, unassuming air. He was a rather short, florid man, dressed like a typical Hebraic financier, with too much watch-chain and too little waistcoat. In his fat hand he held a gold-headed cane, and an absolutely new silk hat—for it was Friday, and Mr. Levi purchased a new hat every Friday of his life, holiday times only excepted. He breathed heavily and sniffed through his nose a good deal, as though he had just performed some Herculean physical labour. He glanced at the American millionaire with an expression in which a silght embarrassment might have been detected, but at the same time his round, red face disclosed a certain frank admiration and good-nature.

"Mr. Racksole, I believe—Mr. Theodore Racksole. Proud to meet you, sir." Such were the first words of Mr. Sampson Levi. In form they were the greeting of a third-rate chimney-sweep, but, strangely enough, Theodore Racksole liked their tone. He said to himself that here, precisely where no one would have expected to find one, was an honest man.

"Good-day," said Racksole briefly. "To what do I owe the pleasure—"

"I expect your time is limited," answered Sampson Levi. "Anyhow, mine is, and so I'll come straight to the point, Mr. Racksole. I'm a plain man. I don't pretend to be a gentleman or any nonsense of that kind. I'm a stockbroker, that's what I am, and I don't care who knows it. The other night I had a ball in this hotel. It cost me a couple of thousandsomeodd pounds, and, by-the-way, I wrote out a cheque for your bill this morning. I don't like balls, but they're useful to me, and my little wife likes 'em, and so we give 'em. Now, I've nothing to say against the hotel management as regards that ball; it was very decently done, very decently, but what I want to know is this—Why did you have a private detective among my guests?"

"A private detective?" exclaimed Racksole, somewhat surprised at this charge.

"Yes," Mr. Sampson Levi said firmly, fanning himself in his chair, and gazing at Theodore Racksole with the direct, earnest expression of a man having a grievance. "Yes, a private detective. It's a small matter, I know, and I dare say you think you've got a right, as proprietor of the show, to do what you like in that line, but I've just called to tell you that I object. I've called as a matter of principle. I'm not angry—it's the principle of the thing."

"My dear Mr. Levi," said Racksole, "I assure you that, having let the Gold Room to a private individual for a private

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entertainment, I should never dream of doing what you suggest."

"Straight?" asked Mr. Sampson Levi, using his own picturesque language.

"Straight," said Racksole smiling.

"There was a gent present at my ball that I didn't ask. I've got a wonderful memory for faces, and I know. Several fellows asked me afterwards what he was doing there. I was told by someone that he was one of your waiters, but I didn't believe that. I know nothing of the Grand Babylon, it's not quite my style of tavern, but I don't think you'd send one of your own waiters to watch my guests—unless, of course, you sent him as a waiter; and this chap didn't do any waiting, though he did his share of drinking."

"Perhaps I can throw some light on this mystery," said Racksole. "I may tell you that I was already aware that a man had attended your ball uninvited."

"How did you get to know?"

"By pure chance, Mr. Levi, and not by inquiry. That man was a former waiter at this hotel—the head waiter, in fact—Jules. No doubt you have heard of him."

"Not I," said Mr. Levi positively.

"Ah!" said Racksole, "I was informed that everyone knew Jules, but it appears not. Well, be that as it may, previously to the night of your ball I had dismissed Jules. I had ordered him never to enter the Babylon again. But on that evening I encountered him here—not in the Gold Room, but in the hotel itself. I asked him to explain his presence, and he stated he was your guest. That is all I know of the matter, Mr. Levi, and I am extremely sorry that you should have thought me capable of the enormity of placing a private detective among your guests."

"This is perfectly satisfactory to me," Mr. Sampson Levi said, after a pause. "I only wanted an explanation, and I've got it. I was told by some pals of mine in the City I might rely on Mr. Theodore Racksole going straight to the point, and I'm glad they were right. Now, as to that feller Jules, I shall make my own inquiries as to him. Might I ask you why you dismissed him?"

"I don't know why I dismissed him."

"You don't know? Oh, come now! I'm only asking because I thought you might be able to give me a hint why he turned up uninvited at my ball. Sorry if I'm too inquisitive."

"Not at all, Mr. Levi, but I really don't know. I only sort of felt that he was a suspicious character. I dismissed him on instinct, as it were. See?"

Without answering this question, Mr. Levi asked another. "If this Jules is such a well-known person," he said, "how could the feller hope to come to my ball without being recognised?"

"Give it up," said Racksole promptly.

"Well, I'll be moving on," was Mr. Sampson Levi's next remark. "Good-day, and thank ye. I suppose you aren't doing anything in Kaffirs?"

Mr. Racksole smiled a negative.

"I thought not," said Levi. "Well, I never touch American rails myself, and so I reckon we sha'n't come across each other. Good-day."

"Good-day," said Racksole politely, following Mr. Sampson Levi to the door. With his hand on the handle of the door, Mr. Levi stopped, and, gazing at Theodore Racksole with a shrewd, quizzical expression, remarked:

"Strange things have been going on here lately, eh?"

The two men looked very hard at each other for several seconds.

"Yes," Racksole assented. "Know anything about them?"

"Well, no, not exactly," said Mr. Levi. "But I had a fancy you and I might be useful to each other; I had a kind of fancy to that effect."

"Come back and sit down again, Mr. Levi," Racksole said, attracted by the evident straightforwardness of the man's tone. "Now, how can we be of service to each other? I flatter myself I'm something of a judge of character, especially financial character, and I tell you—if you'll put your cards on the table, I'll do ditto with mine."

"Agreed," said Mr. Sampson Levi. "I'll begin by explaining my interest in your hotel. I have been expecting to receive a summons from a certain Prince Eugen of Posen to attend him here, and that summons hasn't arrived. It appears that Prince Eugen hasn't come to London at all. Now, I could have taken my dying davy that he would have been here yesterday at the latest."

"Why were you so sure?"

"Question for question," said Levi. "Let's clear the ground first, Mr. Racksole. Why did you buy this hotel? That's a conundrum that's been puzzling a lot of our fellows in the City for some days past. Why did you buy the Grand Babylon? And what is the next move to be?"

"There is no next move," answered Racksole candidly, "and I will tell you why I bought the hotel; there need be no secret about it. I bought it because of a whim." And then Theodore Racksole gave this little Jew, whom he had begun to respect, a faithful account of the transaction with Mr. Félix Babylon. "I suppose," he added, "you find a difficulty in appreciating my state of mind when I did the deal."

"Not a bit," said Mr. Levi. "I once bought an electric launch on the Thames in a very similar way, and it turned out to be one of the most satisfactory purchases I ever made. Then it's a simple accident that you own this hotel at the present moment?"

"A simple accident—all because of a beefsteak and a bottle of Bass."

"Um!" grunted Mr. Sampson Levi, stroking his triple chin.

"To return to Prince Eugen," Racksole resumed. "I was expecting his Highness here. The State apartments had been prepared for him. He was due on the very afternoon that young Dimmock died. But he never came, and I have not heard why he has failed to arrive; nor have I seen his name in the papers. What his business was in London, I don't know."

"I will tell you," said Mr. Sampson Levi; "he was coming to arrange a loan."

"A State loan?"

"No—a private loan."

"Whom from?"

"From me, Sampson Levi. You look surprised. If you'd lived in London a little longer, you'd know that I was just the person the Prince would come to. Perhaps you aren't aware that down Throgmorton Street way I'm called 'The Court Pawnbroker,' because I arrange loans for the minor, second-class Princes of Europe. I'm a stockbroker, but my real business is financing some of the little Courts of Europe. Now, I may tell you that the Hereditary Prince of Posen particularly wanted a million, and he wanted it by a certain date, and he knew that if the affair wasn't fixed up by a certain time he wouldn't be able to get it by that certain date. That's why I'm surprised he isn't in London."

"What did he need a million for?"

"Debts," answered Sampson Levi laconically.

"His own?"

"Certainly."

"But he isn't thirty years of age!"

"What of that? He isn't the only European Prince who has run up a million of debts in a dozen years. To a Prince the thing is as easy as eating a sandwich."

"And why has he taken this sudden resolution to liquidate them?"

"Because the Emperor and the lady's parents won't let him marry till he has done so! And quite right, too! He's got to show a clean sheet, or the Princess Anna of Eckstein-Schwartsburg will never be Princess of Posen. Even now the Emperor has no idea how much Prince Eugen's debts amount to. If he had——!"

"But would not the Emperor know of this proposed loan?"

"Not necessarily at once. It could be so managed. Twig?" Mr. Sampson Levi laughed. "I've carried these little affairs through before. After marriage it might be allowed to leak out. And you know the Princess Anna's

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fortune is pretty big! Now, Mr. Racksole," he added, abruptly changing his tone, "where do you suppose Prince Eugen has disappeared to? Because if he doesn't turn up to-day he can't have that million. To-day is the last day. To-morrow the money will be appropriated elsewhere. Of course, I'm not alone in this business, and my friends have something to say."

"You ask me where I think Prince Eugen has disappeared to?"

"I do."

"Then you think it's a disappearance?'"

Sampson Levi nodded. "Putting two and two together," he said, "I do. The Dimmock business is very peculiar—very peculiar, indeed. Dimmock was a left-handed relation of the Posen family. Twig? Scarcely anyone knows that. He was made secretary and companion to Prince Aribert, just to keep him in the domestic circle. His mother was an Irishwoman, whose misfortune was that she was too beautiful. Twig?" (Mr. Sampson Levi always used this extraordinary word when he was in a communicative mood.) "My belief is that Dimmock's death has something to do with the disappearance of Prince Eugen. The only thing that passes me is this: Why should anyone want to make Prince Eugen disappear? The poor little Prince hasn't an enemy in the world. If he's been 'copped,' as they say, why has he been 'copped'? It won't do anyone any good."

"Won't it?" repeated Racksole, with a sudden flash.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Levi.

"I mean this: Suppose some other European pauper Prince was anxious to marry Princess Anna and her fortune, wouldn't that Prince have an interest in stopping this loan of yours to Prince Eugen? Wouldn't he have an interest in causing Prince Eugen to disappear—at any rate, for a time?"

Sampson Levi thought hard for a few moments.

"Mr. Theodore Racksole," he said at length, "I do believe you have hit on something."

Rocco was photographing the body.

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Rocco and Room No. 111.

On the afternoon of the same day—the interview just described had occurred in the morning—Racksole was visited by another idea, and he said to himself that he ought to have thought of it before. The conversation with Mr. Sampson Levi had continued for a considerable time, and the two men had exchanged various notions, and agreed to meet again, but the theory that Reginald Dimmock had probably been a traitor to his family—a traitor whose repentance had caused his death—had not been thoroughly discussed; the talk had tended rather to Continental politics, with a view to discovering what princely family might have an interest in the temporary disappearance of Prince Eugen. Now, as Racksole considered in detail the particular affair of Reginald Dimmock, deceased, he was struck by one point especially, to wit: Why had Dimmock and Jules manœuvred to turn Nella Racksole out of Room No. 111 on that first night? That they had so manœuvred, that the broken window-pane was not a mere accident, Racksole felt perfectly sure. He had felt perfectly sure all along; but the significance of the facts had not struck him. It was plain to him now that there must be some thing of extraordinary and peculiar importance about Room No. 111. After lunch he wandered quietly upstairs and looked at Room No. 111—that is to say, he looked at the outside of it; it happened to be occupied, but the guest was leaving that evening. The thought crossed his mind that there could be no object in gazing blankly at the outside of a room; yet he gazed; then he wandered quickly down to the next floor, and in passing along the corridor of that floor he stopped, and with an involuntary gesture stamped his foot.

"Great Scott!" he said, "I've got hold of something—No. 111 is exactly over the State apartments."

He went to the bureau, and issued instructions that No. 111

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The picture shows how the chef gets the better of the millionaire. The incident will be graphically described in next week's "Phantom Shadows."

was not to be re-let to anyone until further orders. At the bureau they gave him Nella's note, which ran thus:

"Dearest Papa,—*I am going away for a day or two on the trail of a clue. If I'm not back in three days, begin to inquire for me at Ostend. Till then leave me alone.—Your sagacious daughter,*

"Nell."

These few words, in Nella's large, scrawling hand, filled one side of the paper. At the bottom was a P.T.O. He turned over, and read the sentence, underlined, "*P.S.*—Keep an eye on Rocco."

"I wonder what the little creature is up to?" he murmured, as he tore the letter into small fragments, and threw them into the waste-paper basket. Then, without any delay, he took the lift down to the basement, with the object of making a preliminary inspection of Rocco in his lair. He could scarcely bring himself to believe that this suave and stately gentleman, this enthusiast of gastronomy, was concerned in the machinations of Jules and other rascals unknown. Nevertheless, from habit, he obeyed his daughter, giving her credit for a certain amount of perspicuity and cleverness.

The kitchens of the Grand Babylon Hotel are one of the wonders of Europe. Only three years before the events now under narration Félix Babylon had had them newly installed with every device and patent that the ingenuity of two Continents could supply. They covered nearly an acre of superficial space. They were walled and floored from end to end with tiles and marble, which enabled them to be washed down every morning like the deck of a man-of-war. Visitors were sometimes taken to see the potato-paring machine, the patent plate-drier, the Babylon-spit (a contrivance of Félix Babylon's own), the silver grill, the system of connected stock-pots, and other amazing phenomena of the department. Sometimes, if they were fortunate, they might also see the artist who sculptured ice into forms of men and beasts for table ornaments, or the first napkin-folder in London, or the man who daily invented fresh designs for pastry and blanc-manges. Twelve *chefs* pursued their labours in those kitchens, helped by ninety assistant *chefs*, and a further army of unconsidered menials. Over all these was Rocco, supreme and unapproachable. Half way along the suite of kitchens, Rocco had an apartment of his own, wherein he brought out those magnificent combinations, those marvellous feats of succulence and originality, which had given him his fame. Visitors never caught a glimpse of Rocco in the kitchens, though sometimes, on a special night, he would stroll nonchalantly through the dining-room, like the great man he was, to receive the compliments of the hotel *habitués*—people of insight who recognised his uniqueness.

Theodore Racksole's sudden and unusual appearance in the kitchen caused a little stir. He nodded to some of the *chefs*, but said nothing to anyone, merely wandering about amid the maze of copper utensils and white-capped workers. At length he saw Rocco, surrounded by several admiring *chefs*. Rocco was bending over a freshly-roasted partridge which lay on a blue dish. He plunged a long fork into the back of the bird, and raised it in the air with his left hand. In his right he held a long, glittering carving knife. He was giving one of his world-famous exhibitions of carving. In four swift, unerring, delicate, perfect strokes he cleanly severed the limbs of the partridge. It was a wonderful achievement—how wondrous none but the really skilful carver can properly appreciate. The *chefs* emitted a hum of applause, and Rocco, long, lean, and graceful, retired to his own apartment. Racksole followed him. Rocco sat in a chair, one hand over his eyes; he had not noticed Theodore Racksole.

"What are you doing, M. Rocco?" the millionaire asked smiling.

"Ah!" exclaimed Rocco, starting up with an apology. "Pardon! I was inventing a new mayonnaise, which I shall need for a certain menu next week."

"Do you invent these things without materials, then?" questioned Racksole.

"Certainly. I do dem in my mind. I tink dem. Why should I want materials? I know all flavours. I tink, and tink, and tink, and it is done. I write down. I give de recipe to my best *chef*—dere you are. I need not even taste, I know how it will taste. It is like composing music. De great composers do not compose at de piano."

"I see," said Racksole.

"It is because I work like dat dat you pay me tree tousand a year," Rocco added gravely.

"Heard about Jules?" said Racksole abruptly.

"Jules?"

"Yes. He's been arrested in Ostend," the millionaire

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continued, lying cleverly at a venture. "They say that he and several others are implicated in a murder case—the murder of Reginald Dimmock."

"Truly?" drawled Rocco, scarcely hiding a yawn. His indifference was so superb, so gorgeous, that Racksole instantly divined that it was assumed for the occasion.

"It seems that, after all, the police are good for something. But this is the first time I ever knew them to be worth their salt. There is to be a thorough and systematic search of the hotel to-morrow," Racksole went on. "I have mentioned it to you to warn you that so far as you are concerned the search is of course merely a matter of form. You will not object to the detectives looking through your rooms?"

"Certainly not," and Rocco shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall ask you to say nothing about this to anyone," said Racksole. "The news of Jules' arrest is quite private to myself. The papers know nothing of it. You comprehend?"

Rocco smiled in his grand manner, and Rocco's master thereupon went away. Racksole was very well satisfied with the little conversation. It was perhaps dangerous to tell a series of mere lies to a clever fellow like Rocco, and Racksole wondered how he should ultimately explain them to his great master-*chef* if his and Nella's suspicions should be unfounded, and nothing came of them. Nevertheless, Rocco's manner, a strange, elusive something in the man's eyes, had nearly convinced Racksole that he was somehow implicated in Jules' schemes—and probably in the death of Reginald Dimmock and the disappearance of Prince Eugen of Posen.

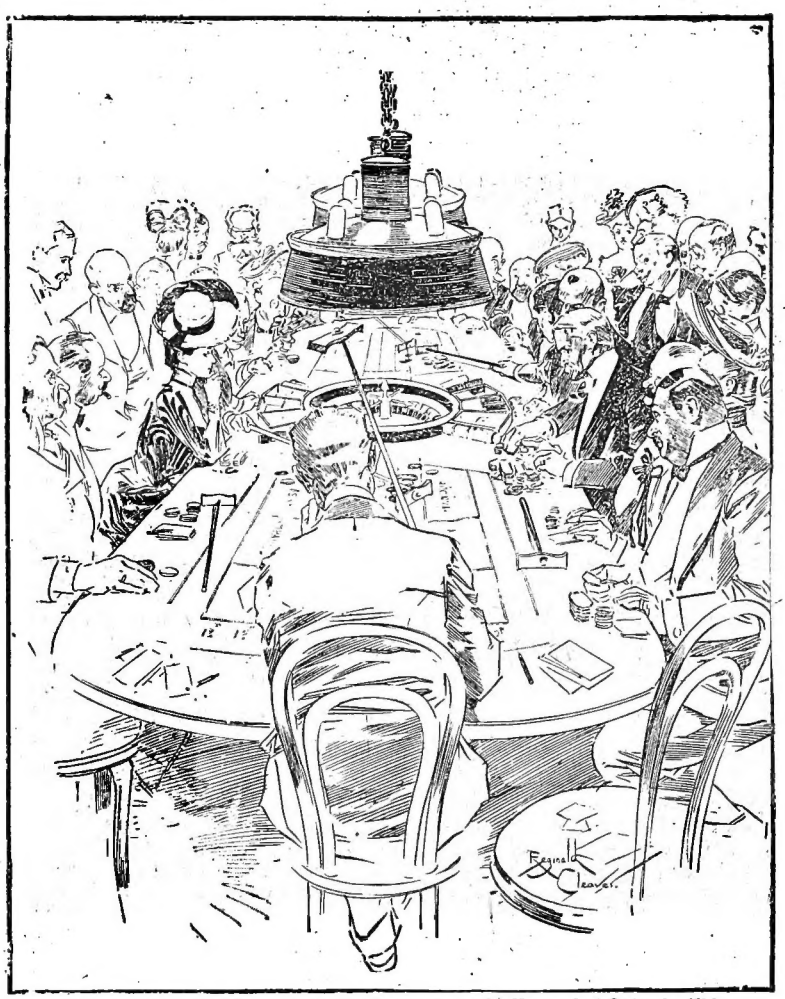
That night, or rather about half-past one the next morning, when the last noises of the hotel's life had died down, Racksole made his way to Room 111 on the second floor. He locked the door on the inside, and proceeded to examine the place, square foot by square foot. Every now and then some creak or other sound startled him, and he listened intently for a few seconds. The bedroom was furnished in the ordinary splendid style of bedrooms at the Grand Babylon Hotel, and in that respect called for no remark. What most interested Racksole was the flooring. He pulled up the thick Oriental carpet, and peered along every plank, but could discover nothing unusual. Then he went to the dressing-room, and finally to the bath-room, both of which opened out of the main room. But in neither of these smaller chambers was he any more successful than in the bedroom itself. Finally he came to the bath, which was inclosed in a panelled casing of polished wood, after the manner of baths. Some baths have a cupboard beneath the taps, with a door at the side, but this one appeared to have none. He tapped the panels, but not a single one of them gave forth that "curious hollow sound" which usually betokens a secret place. Idly he turned the cold-tap of the bath, and the water began to rush in. He turned off the cold-tap and turned on the waste-tap, and as he did so, his knee, which was pressing against the panelling, slipped forward. The panelling had given way, and he saw that one large panel was hinged from the inside, and caught with a hasp, also on the inside. A large space within the casing at the end of the bath was thus revealed. Before doing anything else, Racksole tried to repeat the trick with the waste-tap, but he failed; it would not work again, nor could he in any way perceive that there was any connection between the rod of the waste-tap and the hasp of the panel. Racksole could not see into the cavity within the casing, and the electric light was fixed, and could not be moved about like a candle.

He felt in his pockets, and discovered a box of matches. Aided by these, he looked into the cavity, and saw nothing; nothing except a rather large hole at the far end—some three feet from the casing. With some difficulty he squeezed himself through the open panel, and took a half-kneeling, half-sitting posture within. There he struck a match, and it was a most unfortunate thing that in striking, the box being half open, he set fire to all the matches, and was half smothered in the atrocious smell of phosphorus which resulted.

One match burnt clear on the floor of the cavity, and, rubbing his eyes, Racksole picked it up, and looked down the hole. It was a hole apparently bottomless, and about eighteen inches square. The curious part about the hole was that a rope-ladder hung down it. When he saw that rope-ladder Racksole smiled the smile of a happy man.

The match went out.

Should he make a long journey, perhaps to some distant



The adventure that happens to Mr. Racksole in the Kursaal at Ostend will be told in a forthcoming instalment of "Phantom Shadows."

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corner of the hotel, for a fresh box of matches, or should he attempt to descend that rope-ladder in the dark? He decided on the latter course, and he was the more strongly moved thereto as he could now distinguish a faint, a very faint tinge of light at the bottom of the hole.

With infinite care he compressed himself into the well-like hole, and descended the ladder. At length he arrived on firm ground, perspiring, but quite safe and quite excited. He saw now that the tinge of light came through a small hole in the wood. He put his eye to the wood, and found that he had a fine view of the State bathroom, and through the door of the State bathroom into the State bedroom. At the massive marble-topped washstand in the State bedroom a man was visible, bending over some object which lay thereon.

The man was Rocco!

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
In the State Bedroom.

It was, of course, plain to Racksole that the peculiar passage-way which he had, at great personal inconvenience, discovered between the bathroom at No. 111 and the State bathroom on the floor below must have been specially designed by some person or persons for the purpose of keeping a nefarious watch upon the occupants of the State suite of apartments. It was a means of communication at once simple and ingenious. At that moment he could not be sure of the precise method employed for it, but he surmised that the casing of the waterpipes had been used as a "well," while space for the pipes themselves had been found in the thickness of the ample brick walls of the Grand Babylon.

The eye-hole, through which he now had a view of the bedroom, was a very minute one, and would scarcely be noticed from the exterior. One thing he observed concerning it—namely, that it had been made for a man somewhat taller than himself; he was obliged to stand on tip-toe in order to get his eye in the correct position. He remembered that both Jules and Rocco were distinctly above the average height; also that they were both thin men, and could have descended the well with comparative ease. Theodore Racksole, though not stout, was a well-set man with large bones.

These things flashed through his mind as he gazed, spell-bound, at the mysterious movements of Rocco. The door between the bathroom and the bedroom was wide open, and his own situation was such that his view embraced a considerable portion of the bedroom, including the whole of the immense and gorgeously-upholstered bedstead, but not including the whole of the marble washstand. He could see only half of the washstand, and at intervals Rocco passed out of sight as his lithe hands moved over the object which lay on the marble. At first Theodore Racksole could not decide what this object was, but after a time, as his eyes grew accustomed to the position and the light, he made it out.

It was the body of a man. Or, rather, to be more exact, Racksole could discern the legs of a man on that half of the table which was visible to him. Involuntarily he shuddered, as the conviction forced itself upon him that Rocco had some unconscious human being helpless on that cold marble surface. The legs never moved. Therefore, the hapless creature was either asleep or under the influence of an anæsthetic—or (horrible thought!) dead.

Racksole wanted to call out, to stop by some means or other the dreadful midnight activity which was proceeding before his astonished eyes; but fortunately he restrained himself.

On the washstand he could see certain strangely-shaped utensils and instruments which Rocco used from time to time. The work seemed to Racksole to continue for interminable hours, and then at last Rocco ceased, gave a sign of satisfaction, whistled several bars from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and came into the bathroom, where he took off his coat, and very quietly washed his hands. As he stood calmly and leisurely wiping those long fingers of his, he was less than four feet from Racksole, and the cooped-up millionaire trembled, holding his breath, lest Rocco should detect his presence behind the woodwork. But nothing happened, and Rocco returned unsuspectingly to the bedroom. Racksole saw him place some sort of white flannel garment over the prone form on the table, and then lift it boldly on to the great bed, where it lay awfully still. The hidden watcher was sure now that it was a dead body upon which Rocco had been exercising his mysterious and sinister functions. But whose body? And what functions?

Could this be a West End hotel, Racksole's own hotel, in the very heart of London, the best-policed city in the world? It seemed incredible, impossible; yet so it was.

Again he remembered what Félix Babylon had said to him, and realised the truth of the saying anew. The proprietor of a vast and complicated establishment like the Grand Babylon could never know a tithe of the extraordinary and queer occurrences which happened daily under his very nose; the atmosphere of such a caravanserai must necessarily be an atmosphere of mystery and problems apparently inexplicable. Nevertheless, Racksole thought that Fate was carrying things with rather a high hand when she permitted his *chef* to spend the night hours over a man's remains in this State bedroom, this sacred apartment which was supposed to be occupied only by individuals of Royal Blood. Racksole would not have objected to a certain amount of mystery, but he decidedly thought that there was a little too much mystery here for his taste. He thought that even Félix Babylon would have been surprised at this.

The electric chandelier in the centre of the ceiling was not lighted; only the two lights on either side of the washstand were switched on, and these did not sufficiently illuminate the features of the man on the bed to enable Racksole to see them clearly. In vain the millionaire strained his eyes; he could only make out that the body was probably that of a young man.

Just as he was wondering what to do, he saw Rocco with a square-shaped black box in his hand. Then the *chef* switched off the two electric lights, and the State bedroom was in darkness. In that swift darkness Racksole heard Rocco spring on to the bed. Another half-dozen moments of suspense, and there was a blinding flash of white, which endured for several seconds, and showed Rocco standing like an evil spirit over the body, the black box in one hand and a burning piece of aluminium wire in the other. The aluminium wire burnt out, and darkness followed blacker than before.

Rocco had photographed the body by flash-light!

But the dazzling flare which had disclosed the features of the dead man to the insensible lens of the camera had disclosed them also to Theodore Racksole. The dead man was Reginald Dimmock!

Stung into action by this discovery, Racksole tried to find the exit from his place of concealment. He felt sure that there existed some way out into the State bathroom, but he sought for it fruitlessly, groping with both hands and feet. Then he decided that he must ascend the rope-ladder, make haste for the first-floor corridor, and intercept Rocco when he left the State apartments. It was a painful and difficult business to ascend that thin and yielding ladder in such a confined space, but Racksole was managing it very nicely, and had nearly reached the top, when, by some untoward freak of chance, the ladder broke above his weight, and he slipped ignominiously down to the bottom of the wooden tube. Smothering an excusable oath, Racksole couched, baffled. Then he saw that the force of his fall had somehow opened a trap-door at his feet. He squeezed through, pushed open another tiny door, and in another second stood in the State bathroom. He was dishevelled, perspiring, rather bewildered; but he was there. In the next second he had resumed absolute command of all his faculties.

Strange to say, he had moved so quietly that Rocco had apparently not heard him. He stepped noiselessly to the door between the bathroom and the bedroom, and stood there in silence. Rocco had switched on again the lights over the washstand, and was busy with his utensils.

Racksole deliberately coughed.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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AUNT JEMIMA'S RING.

A Tale of Three Uncomfortable Days.

"ONLY three days ago," said my irreverent brother Harry, "we were all looking out for Aunt Jemima's knock. Now we are all looking out for her ring!"

"Oh, Harry!" exclaimed my eldest sister Margaret, who did not appreciate jokes, and, moreover, had a greater respect for our Aunt Jemima than I fear the rest of us had.

"It's not a matter to joke about," said mother seriously. Poor patient little mother! I am afraid the seven of us were somewhat of a trial to her, at times, though she loved us all dearly. As a matter of fact, there are only five of ourselves, but then Margaret and Horace, the respectable ones of the family, as I always call them, are engaged, and so we always include them.

To begin at the beginning, our Aunt Jemima, from whom I may mention we all have expectations, had come to pay us her bi-annual visit. Every six months she and her maid and her boxes and trunks, and her parrot, Peter, without whom we believed she never went anywhere except to church, swooped down upon our happy household, and for the space of a fortnight demoralised us.

We were passably well off, and lived in a big, old-fashioned house in Hampstead, but though it was big and rambling, it was almost an impossibility to get away from Aunt Jemima! She never gave any of us a moment's peace, from the hour she set foot in the house until she turned her back on us. And when that time came, I fear that every one of us, from mother down to the scullery maid, gave a sigh of unmitigated relief. She was one of those fussy old maids who, having no business of her own to look after, filled up her time by interfering in that of everybody she came into contact with.

She lectured mother about the house, the servants, her extravagance, and our impertinence. I am afraid the latter there was some reason for.

She ordered cook about so, that that dear old thing, who had been with us twenty years and had seen us all grow up from babies—I am the baby, and she was with us when I was born—invariably gave mother notice before Aunt Jemima had been in the house a day or two, and of course had to be implored to stay.

She—I mean Aunt Jemima, not cook—read us all lectures on a variety of subjects, from keeping our tempers to keeping a house clean, lectures which we listened to meekly, and laughed at afterwards. Poor Aunt Jemima! She meant well, but she would fuss!

And now her ring was lost—a very valuable marquise ring, a family heirloom for I don't know how many generations. We, as well as Aunt Jemima, were all positive she had had it on her finger at dinner the night before, because we had all been admiring it, Margaret's lover, Dick Marchmont, especially.

Aunt Jemima vowed she remembered taking it off at night; but at morning it was missing. Aunt Jemima was, as you can believe, furious; we were—well—uncomfortable, and poor little mother miserable.

Well, the house was ransacked from roof to basement. My brother Harry said it was worse than spring-cleaning, because then only the girls did the work, but in this case the boys had to help! But the ring could not be found, though we searched high and low.

"There's a thief in the house, and it's that cook of yours, Janet; all cooks are thieves—more or less," said Aunt Jemima. At this even mother bridled up.

"That is an unfair thing to say, Jemima, and you know it. I would trust cook with untold wealth. Think of the years she has been with us. You must be out of your mind to suggest such a thing!"

"Bravo, mother, give it to her," said Harry under his breath. Aunt Jemima looked both sour and surprised at mother's sudden spirit, and said no more about poor cook, who had always been in her black books.

"Well," she said, "all I know is that it will have to be found, and I shall stay in this house until it is!"

"Cheerful prospect!" murmured my brother Harry.

We were all in the morning-room in solemn conclave, Aunt Jemima bolt upright in the most uncomfortable chair she could find. At this moment my sister Margaret rushed in, with a troubled face.

"Oh, mother," she said, "a terrible thing has happened."

Mother turned pale, and rose from her chair.

"What is it?" she exclaimed.

"You know Jane went out this evening for an hour—a policeman has just called to say that she has been run over by a cab, one of her legs broken, and she has had to be taken to the hospital."

"Good gracious!" murmured poor little mother. I slipped to her side, and put an arm round her. I was the youngest and her favourite, though perhaps I should not say it.

"She is the thief, and this accident is a judgment upon her!" exclaimed Aunt Jemima promptly.

"Nonsense, aunt," my sister Celia cried, "how absurd you are!"

"Absurd, indeed!"

"Yes," said Celia boldly, "absurd!"

"Hush, children," said mother, in the quiet voice that we all loved so—"you forget your aunt has lost a very valuable possession and is naturally somewhat anxious and upset. Someone must go at once, see about this terrible thing, and, if possible, question Jane about the ring."

"Certainly!" snorted Aunt Jemima.

"She may," continued mother, "have put it away for safety, seeing it lying about. It was taken off your finger at the dinner-table last night, you recollect, Jemima, and you wear so many rings, you would probably not miss one.

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and Jane may have found it there, and forgotten to tell us."

"A likely tale!" exclaimed Aunt Jemima.

"No doubt she can explain it all."

"I'll go over at once," said Harry, "and see what she says." And he was off like a shot on his errand. We waited for his return with some anxiety, but Aunt Jemima could not forget to remind us that her belief was that Jane had stolen it, and this was her punishment.

"What a miserable evening!" said Margaret to me in a whisper.

"What a miserable day," I said. "But where is Dick to-night?"

"Gone to Manchester for three days," said Margaret, somewhat dolefully, for, in spite of her calm and dignified manner, she was devotedly attached to her lover — who was in every way worthy of her. I hope when I have a lover—a real lover—I mean, that mine will be as good and as honourable.

"What a pity!" I murmured; "he would have so comforted us all."

"I must write to him."

"I shouldn't tell him about the ring," I suggested, "it will only worry him for nothing, and he can't do anything all that distance off."

"I don't think I can," said Margaret, "it has been nothing but Aunt Jemima's ring all the day. I shall dream of it!"

In due course Harry came back.

"Well," demanded Aunt Jemima, "have you got it?"

"No!" said Harry fiercely.

"Harry, Harry!" It was dear mother's gentle voice. Harry went cool in a moment. We all love her so.

"Forgive me, aunt, and mother!" he said, more softly. "I saw the doctor who took in the case, and he told me she was suffering from a very severe shock, as well as the broken leg, and must not be questioned. In fact, she had been given a sedative, and to awake her would be dangerous. She was identified by one of the tradesmen's books she had gone to pay, our name and address of course being in it."

"Poor Jane," sighed my mother.

"Never mind, mother," said Celia, "we will all three take it in turns to be servant."

"And I'll help," said Harry. "Jane will be all right if she is kept perfectly quiet for two or three days, the doctor says."

"Most unfortunate," sighed mother.

"I consider it most providential," said Aunt Jemima.

"If she is the thief," said mother, "which I do not believe for one moment."

Truly it was a dismal evening, and the next day was as bad, if not worse, for Aunt Jemima the first thing in the morning instituted another search even more exhaustive than the previous one; under carpets, behind the piano, and every other piece of furniture in the house. At noon Harry put on his hat, and avowed his intention to go out and stop out until midnight.

Margaret, Celia, and I—we had resolutely declined to let mother help—were tired out. Horace, of course, was in the City—only Aunt Jemima seemed indefatigable. But our efforts were fruitless. No ring could be found.

To add to our discomfort, cook came up, and, as usual during Aunt Jemima's visit, gave poor mother a month's notice. Aunt Jemima had found time to go down into the kitchen, and, as cook said, had as good as charged her with stealing the ring.

"What should I want to steal her ring for?" exclaimed cook vehemently. "I, with a good place that I have had for twenty years and never a misword, a good mistress, and money in the post-office!"

Then for once mother, aroused, put her foot down, and spoke to Aunt Jemima more determinedly than any of us could have believed it possible. As a consequence, Aunt Jemima subsided into a fit of the sulks, and would not speak a civil word, or an uncivil one for that matter, to anyone. In short, it was about as disagreeable and unpleasant a day as it has ever been my fate to spend. I began to pity Aunt Jemima's maid with all my heart.

That was the second of our uncomfortable days on the occasion of this visit of Aunt Jemima. The morning of the third day, she arose with a new suspicion.

"Where," she demanded at breakfast, "was Mr. Marchmont?"

Aunt Jemima had a peculiar habit of springing surprises upon one, making unexpected remarks which would never have occurred to anyone but herself.

"In Manchester," said Margaret, assuming that the question was addressed to her.

"I wonder," said Aunt Jemima, "if he can clear up the mystery of this ring."

Margaret almost sprang from her chair.

"Do you mean to imply that he has stolen your miserable ring?" she cried. "Who on earth next will you try and fix the blame upon, Aunt Jemima?"

"Pardon me," said Aunt Jemima in her most acid manner, "it is not by any means a miserable ring, but an exceedingly valuable one, and very dear to me from its associations."

"Ring for breakfast, ring for tea, ring for dinner," murmured Harry, but Aunt Jemima heard him and literally withered him with a glance.

"Have you been to question Jane?" she demanded, in her most tragic tones.

Harry confessed that he had not, but would go after breakfast.

"Please do. This matter must be cleared up."

Then, though half afraid, I ventured to put my little spoke into the wheel of the conversation.

"What about Anne, your own maid?" I remarked. It was a thunderbolt out of the blue with a vengeance. Aunt Jemima turned upon me with—was it Sheridan in the play who said it?—such a "disinheriting countenance"?

"Anne!" she ejaculated, "Anne is the soul of honour!"

"'So are we all—all honourable men,'" quoted my brother Harry under his breath.

"I am astonished at you, Felicia, for one moment suggesting such a thing!" pursued my Aunt Jemima, eyeing me malevolently.

"But everyone else appears to be under suspicion," I said boldly, "so why not Anne?"

"Anne! Anne, indeed!" and Aunt Jemima drew herself up "pokerback fashion," and glared at us in turns.

Then dear mother's gentle voice broke in:

"You forget, baby dear, that your aunt has had Anne for so many years, so she knows her fidelity."

I am not quite sure, but I believe my mother was sarcastic; if so, it was for the first time in her life. I lifted my eyes to hers, and in a glance, was forgiven.

"Calling Felicia that tomfool name!" exclaimed Aunt Jemima, "you ought to have more sense!"

Harry stepped into the breach, as he invariably did.

"I'm going over to see Jane," he said, "and I'll come straight back and tell you all I learn." And off he went, with a grimace at Aunt Jemima which, fortunately, she did not see. In less than an hour he was back again.

"Well?" demanded Aunt Jemima.

"She knows nothing of the ring and is very hurt and upset that you should imagine that she should," said Harry.

"What did she say?" said Aunt Jemima.

"It would be a bit more kind, to say nothing of more womanly, if you asked how she was!" replied Harry, who had evidently had a bad quarter of an hour. "To tell you the plain truth, she was so hurt at your suspicion that she nearly went into hysterics. I was bundled out of the place, and it's the last time I go there, for you or for anyone else!"

"I will go myself," said Aunt Jemima.

"No, you won't."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because before I left I gave them instructions you were not to be admitted under any circumstances!"

I, who, excepting Celia, was the only one present, stared at Harry aghast. So, for that matter, did Aunt Jemima.

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She was too petrified to speak. Before she recovered, Harry had gone. But he found time to whisper to me:

"She's lost it herself, the old fool. Back to dinner at seven. Hope Dick will turn up. He'll tackle her, if anyone can."

And no one saw any more of Harry for that morning and afternoon. The third uncomfortable day passed by with leaden feet. Lunch was a dismal "ceremony." It is the only word I can think of in the least appropriate. I went out. Celia was busy. Mother went to lie down. Aunt Jemima, I believe, started to watch her maid pack her belongings, thought better of it, and ordered her to unpack again. I don't think a thousand a year would have tempted me to be Aunt Jemima's maid!

About five minutes to seven I heard Dick Marchmont's knock and ring at the door. I knew it, and as I knew also Margaret was not ready—some callers had delayed her—I, being ready, ran down and met him.

"Come into the drawing-room," I said breathlessly, "and do, for gracious' sake, see if you can explain away our troubles."

"Whatever is the matter? Margaret?"

"No, no, she's all right, and will be down in a moment. It's Aunt Jemima!"

"Oh!" said Dick. Then his face changed. "Great Heavens," he cried, "that reminds me!"

"What of? Oh, but never mind that—let me tell you, Dick. She's lost a valuable marquise diamond ring and——"

"I know she has," said Dick coolly, "and here it is!" And he produced it from his vest pocket.

I gasped.

"You recollect she—but, oh, Margaret"—and Dick turned to embrace his sweetheart, leaving me dumfounded, ignoring even my very presence.

"Baby, I will explain all over the dinner-table."

This was a dismissal, so I ran away, leaving the lovers very near each other. I just had time to tell mother all was right, when the dinner-gong went.

Aunt Jemima, very dignified, met Dick with a haughty bow, which I think more amused him than hurt him. But as soon as we were all seated, he addressed her.

"Miss Verrinder, I think I have an apology and an explanation to give you. You will remember, three evenings ago, showing me this ring?"

Aunt Jemima stared.

"Then you——" she began.

"Oh, dear no, I am not a thief!"

This was, in all innocence, such a very apposite remark that we all laughed, much to Dick's mystification. And Aunt Jemima went red.

"I admired it greatly," Dick went on, "but I returned it to you. When I came back here for my cigarette case, which I had left, I saw it on the floor beneath your chair. I put it in my pocket for safety, and, I must admit, forgot it. This evening, when dressing—I have been to Manchester, as Margaret can tell you, on business—I discovered it. Will you allow me to return it to you, with many regrets and apologies if I have put you to any pain by my forgetfulness?"

I confess I have never seen Aunt Jemima so absolutely dumfounded. She put the ring on her finger without a word. But I didn't enjoy my dinner at all—I was so eager to tell Dick about our three uncomfortable days.

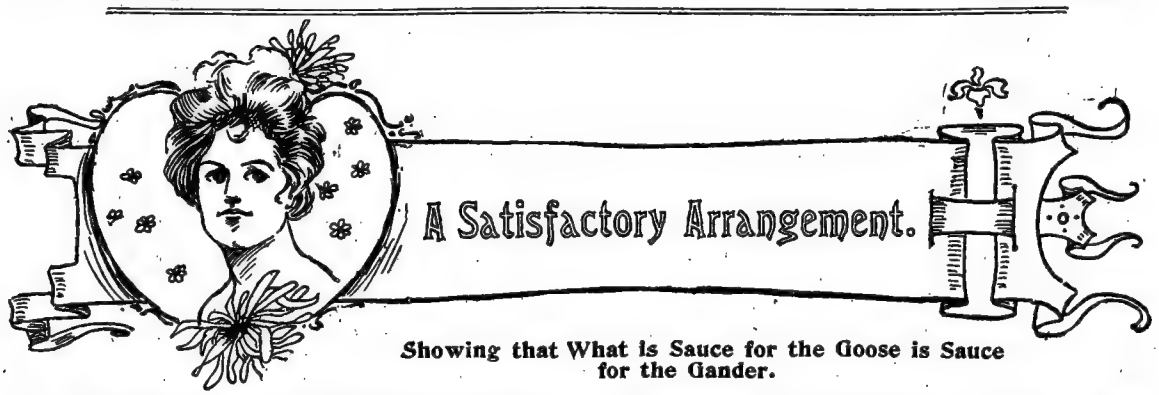
When Margaret and Celia and I did tell him later, he was very vexed.

"I must have been thinking of Margaret," he said.

"Or Manchester!" said my sister tenderly.

I have a Dick of my own now, only his name is something else—never mind what—so I understand these things better, and Aunt Jemima has not been to stay with us for over a year!

Clifton Bingham.



A Satisfactory Arrangement.

Showing that What is Sauce for the Goose is Sauce for the Gander.

"And this is the girl that my nephew Paul has married!" said old Major L'Estrange to himself. "Why, she is nothing but a child; and a lovely child, too."

The soft, yellow twilight was enfolding the drawing-room in its enchanted glamour; and Dolores, rising from her piano, stood with large eyes and heightened colour to receive her new uncle. She was only seventeen, but as she stood there in a gown of the purest white she looked a gem of womanhood.

Young L'Estrange looked first at his wife and then at his uncle with natural pride.

"Here she is, sir!" said he. "My little Dolores!"

And the old gentleman courteously advanced, holding out one slender, aristocratic hand.

"I am very glad to see you, my dear," said he courteously, and not without a tender accent of affection.

And from that moment all Dolores' secret fear and dread of her husband's uncle vanished.

"I am so glad you are not a cross old crab," she said impulsively.

Has Paul given me such a bad character as that?" said the old gentleman smiling.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Dolores. "But he always says: 'My uncle will like this—my uncle will disapprove of that, until, don't you see, I have learnt to be afraid of this unseen potentate! But," with a shake of the blue-black curls, "I am not afraid *now!* Oh, I am sure I shall love you very, *very* much! Might I kiss you, please?"

"You might try," said the Major, looking very much pleased; and from that moment Major L'Estrange and his niece-in-law were sworn allies and firm friends.

"And you love him very much?" said the Major, speaking, of course, of the one Prince Charming.

"Oh, yes!" cried Dolores. "I am sure, Uncle Gerald, that there is no one like him in all the world. *No* one!"

"And he is good to you?"

"Yes, always."

"And you are happy?"

"Yes, and—except——"

"Hallo!" said Uncle Gerald, "here's a flaw in the diamond—a crumple in the rose-leaves! There ought to be no such thing as an *except!*"

"There isn't," stoutly maintained Dolores. "Only——"

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"It's the same thing," said Uncle Gerald, shaking his head. "An '*only*'! Come, Dolores, what is it? Open confession, remember, is good for the soul. What is the meaning of this mysterious 'only'?"

Dolores hung down her head; the ink-black lashes dropped over her peach-blossom cheek.

"It isn't anything at all, Uncle Gerald," said she. "Only—I *should* like a little money to spend sometimes."

"Eh!" said the Major. "Why, how is this? Paul isn't a miser, I hope."

"Not in the least!" cried Dolores. "But—but—I hardly know how to explain myself—he thinks I ought to come to him for every penny I spend. He thinks I should keep within a certain limit. Of course, he's right; but it is a little hard sometimes. There's no need for a woman spending money, he says."

"Ah!" commented the Major.

"And I wanted some chocolates dreadfully yesterday," said Dolores, laughing and blushing. "Of course it's ridiculous—a grown woman like me wanting chocolates like a child; but, indeed, Uncle Gerald, I couldn't help it; and I was ashamed to ask Paul for money to buy candles with; and if there's an organ-grinder or a beggar or a poor woman selling buttons and boot-laces, why, I have my rings and my ribbons and my bracelets, but nothing else."

The Major smiled, and stroked his moustache as he sat there in the shadow of the twilight.

"It is a hard case," said he.

"Yes, isn't it?" cried Dolores earnestly. "I told Paul he ought to give me a regular sum for pin-money, but he only laughs at me, and says I am a little goose. How would he like it himself, I wonder?"

"Ah!" said the Major, "how indeed?"

"And flowers!" cried Dolores, clasping her hands. "There was a flower-girl along yesterday with the sweetest lilies and tube-roses, and I could not buy one. Oh, Uncle Gerald, I did so want those flowers! But Paul says it makes a woman extravagant to have all the money she wants! Would the lilies have been extravagant, Uncle Gerald?"

"No," said the old gentleman, looking at the beautiful speaking face. "I don't think they would. But now, little Dolores, there comes your pony up the drive. Go away, and leave me to sleep."

But the Major did not sleep at all. He meditated. He faced the financial problem of the L'Estrange household, and resolved to conquer it.

Paul L'Estrange came home that evening in excellent spirits.

"My dear uncle," he said, "I shall have to call on your generosity once again. Only fancy my meeting Hall and Ovington on the Parade this afternoon! And they tell me that Colonel Praed and young Jennings are in town also. So I have just ordered a little bachelor supper at the club for to-morrow evening."

"Ah!" said Major L'Estrange.

"I looked at that chestnut mare, sir," added Paul. "She is simply perfect, so I told the man to bring her up here. I am to have her for seventy-five pounds. It's a bargain!"

"Indeed?"

Paul L'Estrange turned quickly round and looked at his uncle

"Is anything the matter, sir?" said he.

"The matter? No. Why should there be?"

"Only your tone was so peculiar—that is all."

"Well, to tell the truth, I was thinking," said Major L'Estrange.

"Of what, sir?" questioned Paul.

"Of where you meant to get the money to pay for all these things," drily answered the old man.

"Why, from you, of course!" said Paul, half puzzled, half amused. "You have always given me all the money I wanted."

"But that is no sign that I shall always continue to do so," deliberately remarked the old gentleman. "Look here, Paul, I am thinking of turning over a new leaf."

"I don't understand you, sir!"

"Don't you? Then I must endeavour to elucidate my meaning a little. The money is mine, isn't it?"

"Most assuredly it is!" Paul answered, with knitted borws.

"Well, then, I have a right to deal it out as I please. And I am seriously thinking of stopping your allowance!"

"Of stopping my allowance, Uncle Gerald?"

"Yes. If you want anything you can come to me for it, you know."

"Like a schoolboy, Uncle Gerald!" cried the young man, with crimsoning temples.

"Why not?" serenely questioned the old gentleman. "Do you know, I've an idea that it makes a man extravagant to have the handling of too much money. That, I believe, is your opinion also."

"Mine, eh?" echoed Paul.

"It is what you tell your wife," said Uncle L'Estrange, with a twitch of the corners of his mouth.

Paul looked puzzled.

"But she is a woman, sir!"

"And, therefore, she has no wants? Is that logic, my boy?"

"I am always ready to give her anything she wants!" exclaimed the young man.

"Exactly the platform which I occupy in respect to you," said Gerald. "And yet you don't seem satisfied with the arrangement I propose. Come! Let's be judicial, my boy. Let us be perfectly impartial. If my niece's money is to be dealt out to her a penny at a time, so must my nephew's!"

"My dear uncle," cried Paul, jumping up, "I never looked at the thing in that light before! My poor little Dolores! What a sordid old miser I must have appeared to her! Why didn't someone do me the favour to tell me what an egregious idiot I was making of myself? What shall I do, Uncle Gerald? Shall I make her a regular allowance—so much a week?"

"I dare say we shall find some satisfactory method of adjusting the balance," said Major L'Estrange, with a smile. "It was a real trouble to little Dolores, and so I thought I would just hold up a looking-glass to you, Nephew Paul. But don't look so grave: you shall have your supper at the club, and your chestnut mare, and all those other little luxuries of life which have grown to be necessities to you. But Dolores must have her chocolates and flowers and other such things also."

"With all my heart, uncle," said Paul, laughing.

And so little Dolores won her cause, after all. She came to her uncle the next day.

"Oh, uncle," said she, "I am so sorry I told you that about Paul."

"Why, my dear?" asked the Major.

"Because we have talked the matter all over," said Dolores, "and he is so good. I am to have a regular allowance all of my own. Isn't he splendid? And I wouldn't have him think I complained of him for all the world!"

"Don't be afraid, my dear," said the Major. "It shall be a State secret between us two for ever and a day. And you are sure you're quite happy now?"

"Oh, yes, *quite*," declared Dolores, with emphasis.

But she did not know that Uncle Gerald was the magician who had wrought this wonderful change.

Carrie Smith.

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Bertha's Trial.

Telling How She Successfully Passed Through It.

"AND so you are going to America, are you, Phil?"

"Yes, I'm off next week."

"You are a foolish fellow in my opinion, Travers. With a good situation here, in a safe house, a good reputation, and a first-rate chance to rise. You are going to throw it up for a mere chance."

"Yes, but, Richards, what is a fellow to do? I might manage very well as a single man, but you see I'm in love, and want to marry."

"Then why, in the name of common-sense, *don't* you marry? You could keep house decently enough on three hundred pounds a year. And if your lady-love is made of the right kind of metal, and loves you, she would much prefer to do so to having you run a great risk in America."

"So she would, bless her loving heart! But I'm not going to permit her to do any such thing. She has been used to comparative luxuries, though her father has nothing but his good income, every penny of which is absorbed in his style of living. No, no! Bertha Clark is to be my wife—not my maid-of-all-work, nurse, seamstress, and washerwoman—so long as I have health and strength."

"But suppose you don't succeed?"

"I *shall* succeed. I feel perfectly sure of it. I shall come home, before long, in good health, and the possessor of a fortune."

"Well, I'm glad you feel so sanguine, old fellow, and I heartily bid you God-speed. But are you sure that Bertha will wait for you?"

—"Sure of her as I am of myself."

"Maybe you're right; but if it was my case, I wouldn't trust a girl in such a matter. I should expect her to accept the first good offer that came to hand."

Philip Travers had never had a doubt of Bertha Clark's love for him, nor any reason to doubt her constancy; but still, the remark of Richards disturbed him.

What right had he to expect a woman to wait for him, when his fortunes were so uncertain? Could he blame her, if, after a reasonable time, she *should* accept "the first good offer that came to hand"?

* * * * *

"Bertha, you have not heard from Phil lately?"

"No, papa."

"And what do you expect to do? You have waited for him now two years, and none of his letters have been at all encouraging."

Bertha twirls her empty tea-cup in her saucer, to charm the tea-leaves into the right position to tell her fortune.

"Rome was not built in a day, you know, papa."

"But, Bertha, you don't know what you're talking about. Girls are always unreasonable. Here you are, past twenty-three years old, and with less and less prospect of marrying. Constancy is all very well, but there can be too much of a good thing. Remember how many good chances you have thrown away since Phil left you, on that wild-goose chase of his and now you do not even know whether he is alive or not."

"Yes; but papa——"

"There is Mr. Grainger, now, who would be glad to marry you, and put you in a better position than either of your sisters is in. A most respectable man, too, by all accounts, if he is not young. He spoke to me on the subject yesterday—said he should have offered himself before this if you had not been so shy and cold. It would be a shame for you to refuse him if he did ask you."

"I certainly shall refuse him, papa. A pretty husband he would make for me—fifty years old at least, and a pretty wife I should make for him—marrying him for nothing but his money! I'm not afraid of being an old maid. I can earn my own living!"

"You're very silly, Bertha Clark!"

"Dear papa, you don't compliment yourself when you call me very silly; everybody says I resemble you in every respect."

And she imprinted a kiss upon her irate father's cheek, and left the room.

* * * * *

"Well, James, what is it?"

"A gentleman in the drawing-room, miss, asking to see you."

"Who is it, James?"

"That oldish gentleman, miss—Mr. Grainger!"

"Mr. Grainger? What a bore! I know papa has encouraged him to this!" said Bertha, to herself, much annoyed. "But, after all, the man is entitled to decent treatment, I suppose? I'll go down, and if he asks me any questions, I can but answer them and end his suspense."

So she tripped down to the drawing-room, where she found her visitor alone.

She had never found herself *tête-à-tête* with him before. She had never noticed how gentlemanly and even winning he was in his manners. She should like him extremely well, she thought, but for the fact that he had proposed for her to her father. He talked a good while upon indifferent subjects, displaying much tact and good sense, as well as general information.

Bertha began to hope that the dreaded question was not to be asked her. In the course of the conversation, he alluded to his having lived in the United States. As he spoke the name a slight blush came to her face, which he evidently noticed.

"By-the-way," he said, "I met a young man in America, a friend of your father's—Philip Travers."

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"Did you indeed?" she asked, trying to conceal the interest she felt under the mask of indifference.

"Yes," he replied. "A very fine fellow, but not very successful. Only about one in a hundred succeeds out there."

He seemed to her to watch her face as he said this, to mark the effect of his words. Her papa, she thought, must have told him something.

Presently he said, moving his chair nearer her own:

"Miss Clark, I am a comparative stranger to you, but I have every means of proving, and have proved, to your father, my respectability. I am rich—so rich that it is impossible for me to enjoy my riches without someone to spend them with me. I could not reasonably ask a young and pretty woman like you to fall in love with an old, grey-headed fellow like me, but if you could like me well enough to marry me, I should treat you so well that I believe love might come afterwards."

She looked at him gratefully.

"Your offer is one that commands my thanks," she said; "but though I like and respect you, I cannot accept it. I could not marry one whom I did not love."

"And you do not love me the least bit in the world—you are quite sure?"

His manner of putting the question was rather impertinent, after what had passed, for he came and took her hand, and pressed it warmly. She flushed scarlet, and withdrew her hand quickly from his, saying:

"A gentleman generally takes 'no,' for an answer."

"But I'm not going to take 'no,' for an answer!" In a moment a grey wig, and a false nose lay on the carpet at her feet, and Phil Travers stood before her. "And yet, I think I'm a gentleman."

"Oh, Phil, how could you?"

"I wanted to try you a little, Bertha. I wanted to be sure that you loved me still—poor as I might be."

"What do you suppose I care for your poverty? Was your faith in me so slight as to need confirmation of this kind?"

"Bertha, don't be angry; but tell me that you love me, and forgive me," he pleaded.

"Of course I love you, miserable doubter! And, of course, I must forgive you! So you have come back as poor as you went?" she said, stroking his black hair, and smiling.

He returned her smile, with interest.

"We can work together, can't we, Bertha?"

"Of course we can."

(Interval for kisses.)

He sat and held her hand in silence for awhile, looking into her happy eyes. By-and-by he said:

"What a pity this lily hand should be soiled by labour!"

"That is what hands were made for, I take it," said she gleefully.

"Not such a hand as this," said he, kissing it. "Such hands were made to wear diamond rings."

Suiting the action to word, he put a magnificent jewel upon her finger—a diamond worth a small fortune.

"Phil, what does this mean?" she asked, turning pale.

"It means, dear love, that I am rich—so rich that it is impossible to enjoy my riches without *you* to spend them with me. I have been fortunate in America. Will you love me just as well, knowing that I am almost a millionaire?"

"I'll try." **Mabel Varney.**

Walter: "If you were going to propose to a girl, what is the first question you would ask her?" Wilter: "If we were alone."

She: "Why should the average woman lead people to believe she's younger than she really is?" He: "She doesn't. She merely tries to."

"Jack says this new horse he has bought is a bargain." "Then it is a safe horse for a lady?" "Why?" "Because a woman can always drive a bargain.'

Your Editor Chats.

A Last Warning.

You have just got time to enter our great signature competition, full particulars of which were given in last week's number.

Numerous valuable cash prizes were offered, and the form of the competition was such as to enable anybody, irrespective of their age or station in life, to enter it.

In the preceding six numbers of this paper were reproduced a variety of people's signatures, which were more or less difficult to decipher. What you are required to do, if you wish to make an attempt to win a handsome cash prize, is to print in the space reserved the name which you think the signature represents. You will derive great amusement in the course of your endeavours. All attempts must be posted so as to arrive at these offices not later than by first post on Tuesday *next*, April 26th, so you will see that you have no time to lose. Copies of *Short Stories* containing the signatures can be obtained from any newsagent for a penny each, or direct from these offices, for 1½d. each post free.

Rally Your Friends.

All of you, I am sure, are following with keen delight the story of the combat for supremacy between Jules and his associates on the one hand, and Theodore Racksole and his staunch allies on the other, as related by Mr. Arnold Bennett in that splendid serial "Phantom Shadows." But are you giving your friends and acquaintances the chance of enjoying it also? If not, why not? Do them and, incidentally, myself, a favour by passing this copy on to them, so that they can commence reading "Phantom Shadows" at once. As it proceeds, you will find that the story increases in power, right on until the last word is told. There will continue to be profuse illustrations by Reginald Cleaver, which will add great interest to the relations. Next week's cover, however, will not depict an incident from the serial, but will illustrate a dramatic episode in a particularly exciting short story, contributed by one of your favourite authors.

The Twelfth Unsolved Love Problem.

Those readers who have never yet tried to win a guinea in an Unsolved Love Problem contest, and those that have, will be afforded another opportunity to do so next week, when the final problem, entitled "The Test of Ruth Lawson," will appear. I think that every single reader will like this story, for it is an exceptionally awkward plight in which Ruth Lawson finds herself.

By-the-way, remember that attempts to solve the eleventh problem, "Brian Cresswell's Choice," must reach these offices by Friday, April 22nd.

Your Editor.

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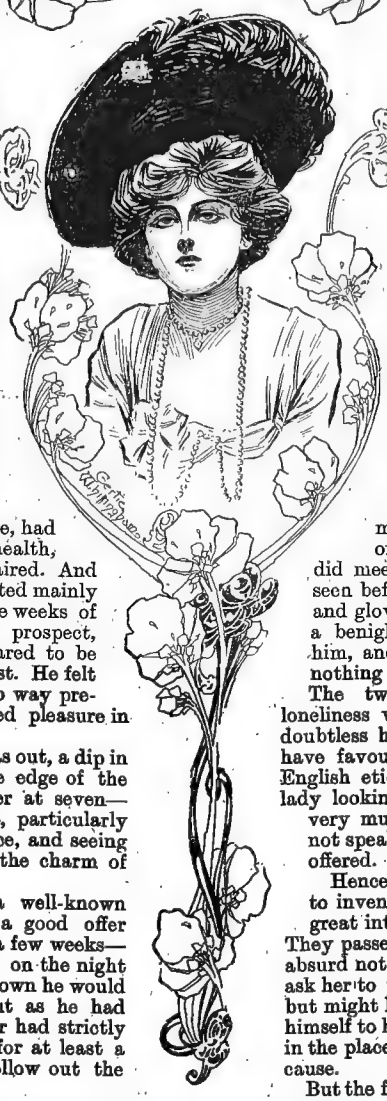
BOLTON'S CHANCE.



Relating the Use He Made of it.

A STEADY drizzle had set in towards evening, and very melancholy the little watering-place looked with its gardens deserted, the bandstand shut up, and the sea parade stretching away in dreary perspective into the distance.

But a solitary visitor had braved the weather, and, wrapped in waterproofs, was pacing the deserted parade, sniffing the salt breeze with an air of evident satisfaction, despite the melancholy aspect of the surroundings.

Jack Bolton, the latest arrival at Oldgate, had been ordered down for the benefit of his health, and was forbidden to leave until it was repaired. And as over-work and long hours had contributed mainly to his illness, the mere idea of having some weeks of leisure before him was a very pleasant prospect, although Oldgate out of the season appeared to be one of the dullest places on the English coast. He felt it a luxury to be an invalid when it in no way prevented bodily activity, and so he anticipated pleasure in his loneliness.

A gallop along the sands when the tide was out, a dip in the sea, a cosy nook, and a novel on the edge of the cliff, and a comfortable, if solitary, dinner at seven—what more could a man want, he thought, particularly one who had been toiling for a bare pittance, and seeing so many people that solitude had all the charm of novelty.

He had given up an engagement on a well-known journal, and had been obliged to refuse a good offer which had been made him; and when in a few weeks—so he cheerfully meditated over his dinner on the night of his arrival in Oldgate—he went back to town he would have to find something else or starve; but as he had thirty pounds in his pocket, and the doctor had strictly forbidden him to think about the future for at least a month—why, he just meant to strictly follow out the doctor's orders.

A month is a long time to a happy-go-lucky nature, particularly when one is young, and Bolton was only three-and-twenty. So for a week his contentment and enjoyment were great, galloping a refractory mare over the splendid stretch of sand; swimming out to the buoy-bell, a quarter of a mile out at sea, that chimed dolorously night and day; devouring novels and minor poetry, chatting and smoking with the old fishermen on the jetty, and sometimes sailing out with one of them into the Channel, with a delightful sense of freedom amidst the seething green waves. But at the end of a week he felt that something more was needed. The grey autumn evenings were lonely, and solitude was no longer a luxury. Novels palled on his taste.

Then he bethought himself of the inhabitants of Oldgate, and wondered if their society was worth courting. And then one evening he had a mental vision of a solitary girl, dressed in black, whom he was conscious of having seen about the place a good deal; and though he had not critically noticed her, he seemed to be dimly conscious that she had a graceful figure and an abundance of yellowish hair, very elaborately done for such an out-of-the-world maiden.

It was odd that the thought of her should take possession of him all at once like this, but it did, and before he went to bed he resolved to see what he could do towards making her acquaintance. "For," he said to himself, with disinterested benevolence, "she must be very dull."

Next day he actually gave up his morning ride and swim for the chance of meeting her on the cliff or parade. He did meet her, and wondered why he had not seen before that she was pretty, and wore dress and gloves in a style that seemed lost on such a benighted place as Oldgate. So she passed him, and he felt interested; but beyond that nothing occurred.

The two had the place to themselves, their loneliness was common to both, and both would doubtless have felt grateful to anyone who would have favoured them with an introduction. But English etiquette being as it is, and this young lady looking very much a lady, and Bolton being very much a gentleman, he saw that he could not speak to her unless some reasonable excuse offered.

Henceforth the whole object of his days was to invent or find such an excuse, and this added great interest to his stay for several days. They passed one another constantly, and it seemed absurd not to go up to her and just lift his hat and ask her to pardon the impertinence, if such it was; but might he do himself the honour of introducing himself to her, as they seemed to be the only people in the place, and ought, therefore, to make common cause.

But the fear of a snubbing, together with the other reasons to which I have referred, kept him from doing this, although it was very aggravating, as day after day went by and nothing happened to give him the chance he wanted.

One evening, before the dusk of a sad, grey day, when the sea was mourning dolefully on the sand, Bolton wandered down the gardens smoking a big cigar to comfort his lonely heart, when he heard a rustling noise among the shrubs at the side of the walk. He hit them with his stick, and a little spaniel ran out, and then round a bend in the path came the girl in black, panting and hurried.

This was the opportunity Bolton had prayed for.

"You are trying to catch your dog?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; have you seen him?" she panted.

"Yes, there he goes; I'll catch him for you," and off he started.

For ten minutes there was a great havoc done amongst the dripping rhododendrons, and much yelping from an extremely obstinate little dog, and then Bolton, wet, dirty, and hot,

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came forward, holding by the scruff of its neck the snarling little King Charles, also wet, dirty, and hot.

"Have you a chain or string?" gasped Bolton; "you want to lead him, I suppose."

"The string broke and I've lost it," she explained. "Thank you so much, I'm afraid it has been a lot of trouble to you."

"Not at all," I say; "I'm afraid I haven't any string, either."

"Oh, never mind!" she said, holding out her arms, "I'll carry him home."

Bolton looked doubtfully at the bedraggled little beast. He was about to offer his handkerchief as a leading string, when a better idea presented itself.

"Oh, no," he said decidedly, "he's much too dirty for you to carry; I'll carry him home for you. I don't mind being dirty."

"I don't like to put you to so much trouble," she protested.

"I sha'n't mind it a bit," he said. "Which is your way home?"

Then they started. Bolton broke the silence first.

"We seem to have the place very much to ourselves, don't we?" he said.

She laughed. "I think you are the only visitor here."

"Then she is a resident here," thought Bolton; "poor girl!" The spaniel wriggled up in his arms and tried to snap at his chin.

"Yes," he said, "I think I am, and I have found it a trifle lonely; but after this little episode I hope I may have the pleasure of your acquaintance. I have been grumbling to myself for some days past at the laws of etiquette that kept us strangers. In fact, I had been thinking," he said frankly, "what excuse I could possibly offer for introducing myself to you, and I feel quite grateful to this disreputable little dog of yours, although he is trying to bite my chin. May this stand in place of a formal introduction?" he asked.

She smiled. "I don't think we need be formal here; and I am really under a great obligation to you."

"I am more than rewarded," he said. "Oh, is this your house?" as they stopped in front of a white house with wide bow windows.

"You'll come in and let me introduce you to mamma?"

"In my present state I'll ask you to excuse me. May I call to-morrow?"

"Oh, to be sure," she said, as he deposited King Charles on the doormat inside. "Come whenever you like; mamma is not particular about times and seasons."

He promised to call on the morrow, and there was an unusual briskness in his walk as he made his way lodgingwards.

"What eyes she has!" said he to himself, and this ejaculation was not called forth by the spaniel's charms. "What on earth can they do in this benighted place all the winter?" he mused; and then he went to his dinner, very well satisfied with his day's work.

Next morning Bolton called on his heroine's mamma, and after much polite conversation, was invited to dinner.

It was a bright, cheery room that he was ushered into that evening, glowing in the light of a blazing fire, and contrasting delightfully with the churlishness of the scene outside.

The room was cosy, and possessed an abundance of pictures and books, but the faded window curtains and the carpet, old and shabby, bore witness to slender means.

A sword and a portrait of an officer in scarlet, the late Major Meade, his heroine's father, hung over the fireplace. Her mother and her aunt, who lived with them, addressed the young lady as Kitty, and Bolton, who had known many of that charming name, thought he had never seen one so worthy of it before.

The next few days were certainly much pleasanter for Kitty's companionship. She wasn't very clever, perhaps, and she wasn't very modern, like most of the young ladies Bolton knew in town; but her prettiness, her quiet friendliness, and the loneliness of her way of life, drew him to her. She had a beautiful voice, and sometimes of an evening would sing to him, and Bolton would often watch her sitting in the low, homely drawing-room, in the firelight, her beautiful head bending over the keys, and then he would look out into the night and watch the long, white lines of foam gleaming in the darkness, and the flashing light from the lighthouse tower, and find himself unconsciously and passionately wondering why Fate had made him so poor.

Now that he had been nearly a month from town, the shrinkage of his money and the gloominess of his future prospects began to worry him. One morning, however, just at the expiration of the month, he received a letter from one of his town chums:

"Dear Bolton,—*I have an offer to make to you. Old Nuggetts was going to put in an ad. the other day for a man to do some special work in Ireland, when I bethought myself of you, and mentioned your name to him as a likely sort of man. He said at first he thought that you were too young and inexperienced, but I reminded him that you had had your nose to the grindstone for some years now, and knew the routine of the whole business pretty well, so he commissioned me to write to you straightway. If your doctor will let you take it up, I should advise you to do it. It's not permanent, of course, but it means five pounds a week and expenses paid for a few months at least, and it may lead to something better. We should not want you to come here for instructions for a fortnight yet, so you will have time to think it over. I hope you are mending fast.—Yours sincerely,*

"J. Dowley."

Bolton wrote off a letter full of gratitude, accepting the offer. To act as special correspondent was such an alluring prospect to him that he quite forgot to consult the doctor about it.

And now only a fortnight of Kitty's companionship remained, and this passed all too quickly. At last the parting came. A day or two before the expiration of the fortnight, Bolton received a telegram bidding him come up for instructions at once. He went and paid a formal farewell to Mrs. Meade and her sister. Kitty was out. He did not mind this, as he wanted to say good-bye to her alone. On the seafront he saw the familiar figure in black coming towards him. "I have had a telegram," he said, "ordering me up to town this afternoon." He thought she turned a shade paler.

"Then you're going?"

"Yes, I'm on my way to my lodgings now, to pack."

The tone of conversation on both sides was polite, almost distant. Perhaps both wanted to hide what they felt.

"Oh! don't let me stop you, then."

"I'm so sorry I'm going; I've got quite to like this place."

"Really? I'm afraid you've found it dull."

"I did at first, but it's quite a wrench to leave it. I hope I shall see something more of you."

"You'll come and see us if you're near at any time."

"Of course I will."

"I hope you'll get on well in Ireland."

"Thank you. I shall have to work hard, I expect. There, I must be off!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

He pressed her hand and seemed as if about to say something more as she turned from him. He walked on a little way, and then turned and looked after her. Her wistful look haunted him.

He thought of the dreary winter before her, and wondered if he had been more to her than he had thought. Perhaps the autumn days had been brighter to her for their friendship. And as he watched her solitary figure receding, he felt a sudden pity for her, a strong desire not to leave her like this. Soon he was at her side, telling her in hurried, passionate words how his life's happiness depended upon his love being treasured and valued by her. There were at least two happy people in Oldgate that evening, and as Bolton hurried to the train, there seemed a note of joy even in the wild moaning of the sea.

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"I say, Tomkyns, who's that Johnny with Miss Alwyse?"

"Oh, that's Bolton. The famous Bolton, you know."

"What's he done?"

"Blest if I know."

"I say, Freddy, what has the famous Bolton done? Tomkyns here doesn't know."

"Oh, he wrote a political pamphlet or something. I heard some fellows at the club say it was awfully smart. I say, what a mob there is here. Come down and try the champagne cup, it's first rate."

Meanwhile "that Johnny" was deep in conversation with the beautiful Miss Alwyse.

"Oh, Mr. Bolton," she said, "*do* call. We are at home on Wednesday. Papa enjoyed your pamphlet so much. He said it was the best bit of satire he had read for years, and then they whirled off into the crowd of dancers.

Bolton walked home to his lodgings that night in a very sanguine frame of mind. The daughter of a Cabinet Minister had flattered him with an account of her august papa's appreciation of his work, and he was to call at the great man's house.

Some eight months had passed since he left Oldgate, a time of many ups and downs, mostly downs, but a pamphlet of his had taken the public fancy and had given him some little social distinction, though it did not make much difference in his banking-account.

Arrived at his rooms he sat and thought for awhile.

"There's something in Shakespeare," he mused, "about a tide in the affairs of man which taken at the turn will land him—I forget it, but it means that every man has one chance in his life and if taken, it will give him success. My chance has come, unless I'm mistaken," and, with a yawn, he went to bed.

Bolton came forward, holding by the scruff of its neck the snarling little King Charles.

Two days later he presented his card at the Cabinet Minister's house. He was received very kindly by the great man's wife, and in due time received an invitation to dinner.

The Right Hon. James Alwyse was genuinely interested in the young author, and being in want of a private secretary thought to himself that here was his man. "But I have half promised it to Bertie," he confided to his spouse, and as Bertie was his nephew, Bolton's chance of the post was small.

"Hallo, Bolton," said one of his acquaintances a few weeks later as he entered an eating-house in Fleet Street, "we don't see much of you here nowadays. You've been among the nobs, I hear. Mackay told me so, he knows everything. Look here, man, do me a good turn; let me make a par out of it for *Society Scandal*. How does this sound? 'The talented young author of "Tricks and Travesties" is a frequent guest at the table of the Right Hon. James Alwyse, M.P. It is no secret that Miss Alwyse, who possesses beauty of a high order, possesses also £60,000 of her own!' How does that sound, eh?"

"There doesn't seem to be much connection between the two sentences of your paragraph," said Bolton, as good-humouredly as he could.

"Ah! my boy, that's all very fine. Waiter, take this chop away and put it on the grill three minutes longer!—that's all very fine. I tell you what"—folding a pair of unwashed hands on the cloth before him, and leaning over to Bolton—"you keep it up, go in and win; that sort of thing pays better than hard work. You're a lucky beggar."

"You very rightly call me a beggar. I refused a dinner last night because I couldn't afford a shirt."

"Never mind; you'll be giving your own little dinners next summer. I heard from Mackay that you were dancing with Miss Alwyse on Friday, and again on Monday, and——"

"Look here, Mackay is a fool!" cried Bolton impulsively.

"Yes, my dear boy, I've often told him so myself, and I say, Bolton, Mackay says the girl's money is very well invested—5 per cent.—that's over three thousand a year. Old Alwyse used to dabble in finance once. He must be worth a pile. That girl is worth winning, Bolton."

When Bolton left he knew every detail of the case, together with Mackay's ideas about it, and much edified he felt in consequence.

But he was not easy in his mind. There was a substratum of truth in his friend's observations; he was undoubtedly a welcome guest at the Minister's table, particularly to one member of the family. And away in the little village in the west was Kitty—Kitty who was so proud of his success and so hopeful for the future—Kitty to whom he was all in all, and he in the turmoil and stress of his life had almost lost his longing for her. Seeing hundreds of fresh faces daily, ever bent on advancing his worldly prospects—at first for Kitty's sake, and then more selfishly—what wonder if new hopes, new desires had found their way into his head; nay, within the last few weeks had not a new love been springing in his heart?

But he resolved to abide by his promise. Kitty should know nothing of this; and if his letters to her were shorter than formerly, he excused it by pleading the stress of his work.

To be befriended and favoured by a girl so womanly and lovable as Miss Alwyse, with wealth and bright surroundings to set off her charms, could only end in one way.

Sometimes he rebelled against his better self; he told himself he had no right to sacrifice love at the altar of pity,

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and his fondness for Kitty sprang from that. Miss Alwyse had no idea that he was engaged. He had no intimate friends to whom he had spoken of his engagement, so no rumours of it had reached her ears. If he had been in love with Kitty, doubtless Miss Alwyse, with a woman's quick instinct, would have found it out, but, alas, he was not.

And now one night he found himself dancing with Miss Alwyse for the last time of the season.

"Mamma has asked you to come and stay at Holmhurst?" she said to him.

"Yes; it is very kind of her."

"I hope you mean to come. Are you fond of the country? We have such a wonderful avenue; it's the envy of the country."

"I think I shall be able to shake the dust of town off my feet for two or three days after next week."

"I'm so glad. You look quite pale, you know; you're working too hard."

"I *am* working hard." It was quite delightful to have so charming and wealthy a woman so solicitous about his health.

And a letter of Kitty's was in his dresscoat-pocket. He had thrust it in while dressing, and meant to have read it in the cab, but he had forgotten it.

As he put Miss Alwyse in her carriage she pressed his hand.

"It is good-bye till the tenth, then?"

"Yes, yes, till the tenth; I shall count the hours, I believe."

A low, musical laugh, and the carriage bowled away. He stood there light-hearted and gay till he remembered the letter in his pocket.

Ten days later he was smoking in his sitting-room and packing his things preparatory to departing on the morrow for Holmhurst. Three days in a country house with a girl who obviously cared for him, and a Cabinet Minister who, he had reasons to believe, meant to offer him his private secretaryship; this surely was his chance. His advancement had been slow, but the tide had turned now—and Kitty kept him back from going on and winning the full measure of possible success. Should he write and ask her to release him; should he confess all—his new love? It was a terrible situation to be placed in.

At this juncture a telegram was handed to him:

"*Kitty is very ill, and asks for you. Come at once.* — M. Meade."

He sat as one paralysed. Then he broke out into an imprecation. "Now, of all times I can't go! I can't get away again for a month. It's bitterly cruel!" "Kitty is very ill and asks for you—asks for you." "Poor little Kitty!" He began throwing out from his bag things that he wouldn't need now. "There's a train to-night," he muttered, "Fate is against me always."

He snapped the lock of his bag and rang for a cab.

Two hours later he was walking along by the side of the sea to Mrs. Meade's house. The scene brought back some of the old tenderness for Kitty. "But my love for her is dead. It is a ghost of a passion now—a ghost!" he kept repeating.

He came in sight of the familiar bow windows—how his heart beat when he came in sight of them six months ago, when he snatched a few happy days' holiday at Christmas. And then the moon came from behind a cloud and he saw something that smote like a dagger in his heart—straw in the street.

"My poor little Kitty!" he groaned, and tremblingly rang the bell.

Mrs. Meade herself opened the door.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come!"

"Is she——?" he could get no further.

"She will know you now. She has been delirious all the afternoon."

He entered the dark room.

"Is that you? Oh, Jack, Jack!"

"My darling!" he said, bending over her and kissing her passionately.

He sat with her for an hour—a year it seemed—and she was so glad he had come. And, outside, the low wash, wash of the waves sounded. It had been music to him once; he has never heard it since without thinking of that dark room. At last the doctor came. "Go downstairs a few minutes, old man," he said kindly. Noiselessly he went into the dining-room. There was the piano, and her music on the top—a song he had written on the music-holder. Poor Kitty, she would never touch those keys again.

He went to the window and looked out at the lighthouse light and the lines of foam. A bowl of roses scented the room. He seemed to have resumed his life where he had left it off when he last left Oldgate at Christmas.

The time between—London, Miss Alwyse, his future hopes and plans—all were nothing. Three hours ago he was reviling the Fate that sent him down here, and now, now everything was nothing except Kitty. "Oh, my God, spare me her and take everything else," he groaned, and bowed his head on the table, and sobbed as only a man can. The doctor came softly down. "Old fellow, it's kinder to tell you the worst, she can't live through the night; you had better go to her again," he said huskily.

Choking down his sobs, Bolton went to her bedside.

Two hours later he was kneeling by a lifeless form that he now realised was more to him than anyone dead or living.

When he re-appeared in London someone said to him: "Why, Bolton, you've lost a good thing. Alwyse meant to offer you his private secretaryship, and now his nephew has got it. I say, old man, who's dead? What! Were you engaged? I am so awfully sorry for you. There, I won't say any more, I know words are of no use at such a time."

Miss Alwyse heard why Bolton had not fulfilled his engagement, and cried a good deal in the privacy of her room.

Bolton is still in harness, but his ambition is dead. His editor, however, has a high opinion of him, and has promised him the war-correspondentship of his paper when the opportunity occurs. And, Bolton, whose only hope is work, absorbing work, that gives no time for thought, prays daily for war.

Douglas Montgomery.

The Groom (at the first stopping place): "It's no use, Clara; we can't hide it from people that we are bride and groom." The Bride: "What makes you think so, George, dear?" The Groom (dejectedly): "Why, here the waiter has brought us rice pudding."

Nellie: "Why are you crying, love? I should think you would be very happy engaged to such a nice young man as he is!" Annie: "Oh, I'm afraid he won't be true to me!" "Why, he's very, very good, isn't he?" "Yes, but I'm afraid he's too good to be true!"

Harry wanted to give Lucy a birthday present, but couldn't make up his mind what it should be; so the next time he called he frankly told her the difficulty under which he was labouring. "Want to make me a present, Harry?" exclaimed Lucy, in well-counterfeited astonishment. "Why, Harry, you forget yourself!" Harry took the hint, and offered himself on the spot.

Stranger (at the door): "I am trying to find a lady whose married name I have forgotten, but I know she lives in this neighbourhood. She is a woman easily described, and perhaps you may know her—a singularly beautiful creature, with pink-and-white complexion, sea-shell ears, lovely eyes, and hair such as a goddess might envy." Servant: "Really, sir, I don't know——" Voice (from head of stairs): "Jane, tell the gentleman I'll be down in a minute."

Caller: "Why are you waving your handkerchief so wildly?" Muriel: "Since papa has forbidden Jack the house we have arranged a code of signals." Caller: "What is it?" Muriel: "When he waves his handkerchief five times, that means, 'Do you love me?' and when I wave frantically in reply, it means, 'Yes, darling.'" Caller: "And how do you ask other questions?" Muriel: "We don't. That's the whole code"

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The Match-makers.

Relating how Things Worked Out in a Different Manner than as They were Arranged.

A low, rambling cottage. Quaint porticos nearly covered with climbing roses, and a long verandah shaded with ivy, gave a cool, inviting look to this little home. From one of the verandah columns and a large tree a few feet away swung a gay hammock. Half reclining in this was a young girl—a sparkling, dark-eyed brunette. One elbow rested carelessly on an open magazine, while a bit of embroidery lay at her feet. Her eyes were absently fixed on the stately house which could be seen through the intervening orchard.

"What a pity it is Mr. Browning is such a confirmed bachelor!" mused she. "If he would marry some nice young person, how much comfort we might take with her. His sister told me herself not long since that she wished John would marry. Then she could go to her daughter in London."

Here Miss Muriel bestowed a very disapproving frown upon the aforesaid house. Evidently its owner's shortcomings did not disturb its equanimity. It never flinched.

Muriel's face cleared, and she sat erect.

"I have it!" she exclaimed half aloud. "Cousin Winnie! She's the very one for him! I will invite her up to spend a few weeks with us, and if her big blue eyes do not melt his heart, I shall conclude it is made of stone. We'll have him to tea often while she is here. I will get up a picnic in their honour. It will be a fine match for Winnie, and I shall take a great deal of credit to myself for having brought it about."

The magazine fell to the ground. The hammock gave a backward lurch, and Muriel was half way up the steps, stooping to pick a rose as she passed.

"Mamma, mamma! Where are you?" she called, as a hasty glance showed the little sitting-room opening from it to be without an occupant. "Robert," she called to the gardener, "have you seen Mrs. Gilday?"

"She's gone to see Mrs. Dake, miss, I think," replied Robert, with a nod of his head towards the neighbouring house.

Muriel returned to the sitting-room.

"Mother and Mrs. Dake seem to have become quite intimate of late," she thought. "Mrs. Dake was here yesterday. Perhaps mamma wouldn't be pleased to have Mr. Browning marry and his sister go home. I will not say anything to her of that brilliant idea of mine. She will be pleased, however, to have Cousin Winnie here for a visit, so I'll write to her at once."

A dainty, perfumed envelope, addressed in flowing characters, soon lay upon the hat-rack in the hall.

The side door opened, and Mrs. Gilday entered. One looking at her sweet face and shining bands of brown hair would hardly suspect how tragical had been her married life. At twenty a bride, at twenty-five a widow. How much of sorrow, suffering, and humiliation had been crowded into that brief time it would be hard to estimate.

Only once had Muriel ventured to ask of her father. She had not forgotten the look which came over her mother's face.

"He died when you were a baby, dear," was all she said.

Years after Muriel heard from an old nurse who visited them that her father was a gambler who had spent most of her mother's fortune and died from the effects of drink.

Ever since she could remember they had lived in this pretty cottage at Glen Park. Her mother had given music lessons and superintended the care of the orchards. A small legacy had been left her, sufficient to keep her daughter and herself from poverty.

"Hallo, mamma!" cried Muriel gaily, as her mother entered. "You look as young and blooming as a girl of sixteen. Someone inquired the other day if we were sisters, and methinks I shall soon be asked if you are my daughter! You needn't blush! It reminds me of my own inability in that line.

Mrs. Gilday smiled at Muriel's nonsense.

"Have you been writing?" she inquired. "I notice your desk is open."

"Yes, to Cousin Winnie; asked her if she could come out for a visit. She must be dreadfully tired of sewing. It will do her good to take a holiday. Don't you think so, mamma?"

"Yes, certainly. I had thought of getting her to sew for us after a bit, but she shall have her visit first—that is, if she can so arrange it."

The Fates seemed to favour Muriel's little scheme. Cousin Winnie wrote:

"What a kind-hearted little person you are! I am tired of sewing. Shall be only too glad to accept your invitation."

About this time Mr. Browning gave up his daily trips to London and took to making frequent calls at Mrs. Gilday's cottage. They were all business calls. A letter to deliver; some inquiry in regard to the care of poultry or his garden. Mrs. Gilday was an authority on such subjects. Or perhaps Mrs. Dake sent compliments, and would they all come over to tea that evening?"

Winnie noted with great complacency that he never seemed

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in any haste to terminate these calls. On one occasion he lingered all the afternoon when he had merely "dropped in to borrow Mrs. Gilday's pruning shears." Surely Cousin Winnie's blue eyes and pretty, quiet ways were producing the desired effect.

There was another affair which seemed to require a share of Muriel's notice at this time. The attentions of a certain young man whose name was Frank Evans were evidently becoming somewhat too pronounced. He and Muriel had been to school together, carried their dinner in the same basket, and quarrelled as to who should take the basket home again. Later on he had escorted her to parties, picnics, and other merry-makings. She still exercised the sisterly right, which she had always claimed, of telling him her opinion of his actions. So now, when he took to lingering on the pleasant portico in the early mornings when she knew he had started for his father's office, she showed her disapproval, and on one occasion told him plainly that he "ought to be at work."

He started on, laughingly protesting, while after his departure Cousin Winnie said deprecatingly:

"Now, Muriel, that was too bad to drive him off in that way. What would your mother say if she had heard it?"

"Haven't any idea," replied Muriel, carelessly. "It's the truth I told him. He is not rich, and he ought to be at work instead of dawdling his mornings away here." To herself she added, "I hope he isn't going to get spooney; that will spoil him entirely. He is nice enough to take one about, but when I marry it will be——" And she was lost in a reverie in which a tall, fair-haired hero with a military bearing was metaphorically dying to have her accept his name and fortune.

The weeks sped by, each filled with an unusual number of drives, afternoon teas, and tennis parties. Muriel was very busy in these days. The frequent *tête-à-têtes* enjoyed by Winnie and John Browning were brought about by the tact of our enterprising heroine.

Winnie had announced that she should return to town the following week. The long-talked-of picnic was arranged for the Thursday previous to her departure.

The day, like its predecessors, dawned calm and cloudless. The occupants of house and cottage were astir at an early hour. Everybody was going. At half-past nine, various traps filled with young and old, all in gay spirits, could be seen wending their way down past the park to the foot of the neighbouring hills.

At last the appointed place was reached. Here the horses were tied, and the party began explorations for a suitable place for dining. After that most important feature of a picnic was over, the younger members of the party declared their intention of pushing on to the top of the wooded hills. To Muriel's disappointment, John Browning counted himself among those who were "too old for such a scramble."

Muriel, Frank Evans, and Winnie started on as leaders of the party. The two former were quite accustomed to climbing hills, but Winnie was not, and before half the distance was accomplished seated herself on a fallen tree, declaring that "she could not go another step." Frank gallantly offered to keep her company while the rest went on.

Muriel clambered on, out-distancing the others. When the stragglers overtook her they said that Frank and Winnie had decided to come on; so on their return Muriel sat down behind a clump of bushes, intending to wait for them. Soon she heard their voices, but did not at once retrace her steps to join them. Just then she heard Frank say:

"I have loved you, Winnie, ever since you were here a year ago."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Muriel to herself. "Is that possible?"

Of Winnie's reply she only caught the word, "Muriel?"

"Nonsense!" said Frank. "I have only a brotherly interest in her."

"My sentiments, too," thought Muriel. "Shall I rush out? No, that will only startle them. It will be embarrassing enough for Winnie to have to refuse him."

But the next words she heard were a double surprise. Winnie had accepted Mr. Evans.

"How can she think of him?" groaned Muriel. "He is not to be compared with Mr. Browning. Young, poor, and—such a tiny moustache! Poor Mr. Browning! What will he do now? Such a nice man, too!"

With these and similar reflections, Muriel left her flowers on the stones where they had fallen from her hands and hastily emerged from behind the bushes. Frank and Winnie had passed on, utterly oblivious of everything but themselves. Muriel hastened on, joining the party she had left a few moments before.

That evening, to Muriel's surprise, John Browning stopped to tea with them. After that was over he sauntered out to the verandah to enjoy the moonlight and a cigar. Winnie excused herself on the plea of "packing," and went to her room.

Mrs. Gilday and Muriel remained in the drawing-room to unpack the hampers and set things to rights.

"My dear," began Mrs. Gilday, emptying the contents of a saltcellar into the sugar bowl. "My dear, I have something to tell you. Perhaps I ought to have told you before."

Here she dropped the saltcellar on the floor. Muriel looked at her mother in surprise. Never had she seen her show such evident embarrassment.

"I hope you will not be displeased," she went on, "but I have promised to marry Mr. Browning."

Muriel gave a little gasp.

"Dear mamma, I am so glad!" she firmly ejaculated.

"Are you really?" said Mrs. Gilday, with a relieved expression. "I was afraid you might not be pleased."

"I am—quite pleased—and surprised."

Here Muriel dropped into a chair and began to laugh hysterically.

"What a matchmaker I am, to be sure!" she thought. Then she exclaimed aloud:

"Mother, I have found my vocation—the management of a Matrimonial Bureau!"

K. Porter.

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AN AFFECTION OF THE HEART.

Explaining the Love Story of a Man who was very Dense and Stupid.

SILENTLY and swiftly it flows, the strong tidal river. On past fields and pasture-lands, smoothing rugged corners, winding in and gliding out, until, taking a bend by an old farmhouse, it splashes across some ancient boulders, and escapes to the sea, there to await the returning tide.

Away in the distance the shining harbour may be seen, with small craft dancing on the sunlit waves, while every here and there rise the tall masts of some foreign barque, hoisting sails for a morning departure.

Spring is sweet, and Spring is fair, and a maiden's thoughts may soon be lost in reverie when she wanders amongst the apple-blossom in a quaint Cornish orchard.

Gladys Charlton wends her way down the daisied slope to a low wall, past which the brimming water hurries in its haste to be gone. Here she finds a seat, and gives herself up to the enjoyment of a quiet hour with the birds, flowers, and sunshine. She realises an ideal restfulness, and wonders how it can be that only yesterday she was right in the heart of the Metropolis.

Gladys is studying to be a doctor. Do not frown, and say: "I disapprove of her; women-doctors are a delusion"; for her motives are of the truest and best.

Her own mother had died when Gladys was eleven years old, and in less than three years Mr. Charlton married a second wife—a peevish, jealous woman, who made her little step-daughter's life so unbearable that her father sent her away to school; and from that time the girl ceased to have any love for her home, though formal relations were duly observed between herself and Mrs. Charlton.

When school-days were nearly over, Gladys dreaded the prospect of an existence in Cornwall, and sought for some loophole by which to escape from such a dreary life. She frequently visited at the house of a kindly old doctor and his wife at St. John's Wood, and perhaps all she saw and heard there induced her to choose the medical profession as her vocation.

Mr. Charlton gladly gave his consent, for he, too, had misgivings as to how things would be when his daughter came home. And though Gladys had her faults, she was well fitted for her work, being strong, energetic, gentle, and clever withal.

It is now the mid-term recess, and Gladys is free for three weeks. Her thoughts are happy ones while she queries with herself as to how she shall pass the time; then her mind wanders back to London, and she becomes unconscious of everything, save a labyrinth of questionings concerning the future, the good she will strive to accomplish, and I know not what besides, for the damsel had so many beautiful ideas.

But the most ethereal dreams have a practical ending, and the "young girl-graduate" is disturbed in the midst of her solitary musings. Someone discovers her retreat, and Gladys rises to meet the newcomer.

"Roy?"

"Yes; why not? Jack told me you were at home, so I thought I would come over here this lovely morning and pay my respects to Dr. Charlton. What is the fee for a private consultation?"

"Now, Roy, I'm not going to be teased. Let's go down to the beach, and I'll tell you all the latest news."

But Royland does not appear to care about anything this morning unless it concerns the narrator, and simply grows more and more abstracted. At last Gladys gets cross, and says impetuously:

"Really, Roy, you are terribly dense and provoking! Ten minutes ago I told you that Hermann Sternberg had taken his degree; and now, when I speak of his large practice, you say: 'S-tern-b-berg? Has he left college?' You *are* so stupid!"

"I was wondering about your future, Gladys dear. Don't be vexed because I seemed stupid. But do you really think that you have chosen wisely?"

"*Of course*," is the somewhat scornful reply. "But I don't like you to call me 'dear' now I'm grown up—it's silly!"

And then Gladys grows more gentle as she relaxes into her old manner with Roy, and unfolds her wonderful plans for the benefit of the human race.

Her listener remains silent for a while, and then says smilingly:

"But, Gladys, couldn't you carry out some of these nice ideas now? You say that when you are duly qualified you will have a regular supply of cream and flowers sent up for the Children's Hospital. Wouldn't it be easy to pack a few hampers and send them off during the recess? Why wait until you are settled and have a row of letters after your name?"

Miss Charlton looks a little crestfallen, and answers slowly:

"I never thought of it. You think of everything, Roy."

"In spite of my stupidity," is the laughing retort. "But now I must give *you* some information. Uncle Kenneth is dead, and has left me his money, so, unless I choose, there is no need for me to go on studying for the Bar. What would you advise me to do—give up, or go on?"

"Why, give it up, Roy. I always thought it a pity that you should choose such a profession. You are very good, but not a bit clever. You must go and travel; it will enlarge your ideas. I think this money is a providence."

"Would you miss me?" asks Royland thoughtfully.

"Perhaps a little—that is, when I'm at home; but, you know, my life is too busy to miss people much."

* * * * *

The birds sing their evensong; trees rustle to the sweet tune which the gentle breeze is playing; and blue mists

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rise from the neighbouring valleys as the day's work is ended.

The kine have all gone home, and the flowers close their tender petals to Nature's lullaby; but the air is scented with their perfume. An enchanted hush comes over the land; everything says, "Good-night."

Gladys Charlton will never forget how she stood gazing across the sea that evening.

Suddenly a voice broke the stillness, and Royland Rivers stood beside her.

"Will you wish me a prosperous journey, Gladys? I have taken your advice. I shall be gone a long, long while before you see me again, for I am not *quite* clumsy enough to stay and plead my cause in vain. I know now that it would be useless to ask for more than friendship. Someone more worthy than myself will cross your path in days to come, and try to turn it into his. If so, believe that I shall wish you all happiness. Forgive me if I ask you not to trust to ambition; but grand ideas are useless without *everyday patience and heroism*. There, don't be bothered, Gladys dear; it isn't your fault, only my big mistake. I know I'm stupid and blundering; but say good-bye. I must go."

No reply— the girl is so taken by surprise.

Roy has a true man's heart, and it resists the strong temptation to take one last kiss; so he raises two cold hands from the fence upon which they are clasped, presses them to his lips like a knight of old, and, ere Gladys can frame a single sentence, he has gone.

But the air seems burdened with sadness, the gloaming s less pleasant, and a feeling of oppression lingers behind. Gladys is glad to return to London.

* * * * *

Five years have passed since Royland Rivers said good-bye to Gladys Charlton. She has never heard anything of him since, though at first she half expected he would write. Now, however, new faces and fresh hopes engross the lady doctor. Roy's prophecy appears likely to come true. Gladys is already practising, but rumour says it will not be for long; and the busybodies are gossiping about her and another doctor, "wondering when the wedding will come off," whether Dr. Sternberg clears more than a thousand a year, how they will manage about Gladys' patients, and much more besides, though Hermann and Miss Charlton have not yet breathed a word of love to each other.

Early summer is looming in the purple haze of distance, everyone longs for something fresh or suggestive of the country, and Islington flower-girls, who stand where the pathway of Upper Street is broad and shady, find a ready sale for the clustering bunches of Lent-lilies, violets, and snowdrops.

Dr. Gladys has just been requested to visit a sick child, and pauses to buy the little one some primroses as she hurries along in the morning sunshine.

"Please, mum, I'm sure I'm that sorry; but a lady wot's been here a visitin' have sent her doctor for to see our little un," said a poor woman who opened the door at No. 23 Back Court, in response to Dr. Charlton's summons.

"Well, never mind," is the cheery reply; "just ,give Lina these, Mrs. Hemming, please, and say that I'll run in to-morrow. How is she?"

"Rather less feverish," says Hermann Sternberg, M.D., as his tall figure appears in the doorway. "Good-morning, Miss Charlton; I suppose I must abdicate in your favour?"

"Oh, no; I haven't any desire to interfere. Lina and I are excellent friends; but I'm going into Cornwall next week for a few days, and I shall be glad if you will attend well to her interests; she's such a nice child, and her mother is so poor," continues Gladys, as she and Dr. Sternberg walk away together.

Miss Charlton has a great idea of her friend's wonderful abilities; almost unconsciously he dwells in her thoughts a good deal, and she mentally raises him to a standard-point far beyond his fellows. At every dinner-party, on every possible occasion, Hermann has singled her out from all others. She is proud to be his confidante, and this morning his manner suggests that he hopes she will become something dearer still. Gladys can scarcely tell the reason why, but she feels that it is so, and grows shyly glad at the thought.

The same evening an exquisite bunch of white flowers is left at Dr. Charlton's door, with Dr. Sternberg's "kind regards." There is a small note attached, which is evidently gratifying to the lady doctor, for, after reading it she leans back in her chair and looks anything but professional. Something softens her eyes, and a gentle expression comes over her face. Cupid smiled and said: "Ah, it may have taken months of my skill, but I have surely aimed aright."

Some folks think that women-doctors are minus feeling; just a bundle of nerve and learning—let them dismiss the idea. Gladys Charlton neither adopted man-like airs, strode heavily, nor smoked. She had boarded with girls who did all three, but *her* life and bearing remained free from *anything* approaching the masculine style.

* * * * *

When Dr. Charlton returns to town she is very busy, and does not see Hermann Sternberg for three or four days. However, after once meeting him, she makes inquiries concerning the little patient in Back Court; but he evades a direct reply.

"But, tell me," insists Gladys, "how you really think she is going on?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, Miss Charlton—you know I wasn't properly her doctor—it isn't a monetary case; and I've been so very busy that I've really had no time to go. Do you know that Lady Mayborough has called me in to attend her children? They're down with scarlet fever."

But only scorn meets this piece of information. Gladys looks white and angry; she treats Hermann with contempt, as she exclaims:

"Thanks for your candour, Dr. Sternberg; *I* will never ask you to spare one moment from your monetary patients again. I thoroughly despise such meanness. For the future, I beg that you will kindly leave that poor child to the tender mercies of a woman! Pray do not stand a minute longer. Lady Mayborough's children may be requiring your valuable services. Good morning."

It cost Gladys an effort to say this to the one person for whose good opinion she had learnt to care the most; and there was a feeling of terrible aching and disappointment for many days afterwards. It is poor comfort when people say at such times:

"Well, he's not worth troubling about; you may feel thankful you've made the discovery in time."

And you *may* be thankful in *one* way; for when your friends die suddenly, you may express your thankfulness that they were spared a long illness and lingering death; but it does not make your grief grow less; you experience sorrow just the same, and the shock is even greater.

Dr. Charlton hides her trouble from the curious gaze of the

world and expends her spare energy in an increase of work.

* * *

Little Lina is dying; her face grows wee and wan, in spite of its unusual loveliness, and when Gladys asks what she would like, the only reply is:

"I wants *him;* I fink he could make me better; I wants him to tell Lina more 'bout ickle lambs."

"To whom does she refer?" queries Dr. Charlton.

"She means our Sam's master, miss," interposed Mrs. Hemming; "he's sent her lots o' fruit and things; he's bin here himself, too; she's allers a-callin' for him; he's such kindly ways wi' children."

Just then there is a knock at the door.

Surely Gladys has heard that voice before—but what nonsense! Yes, it *must* be he, and Royland Rivers comes into the room.

He starts a little on seeing who is there; but soon calms, and says very quietly:

"Good-evening, Miss Charlton; how is your patient?" and then turns to the sick child, who brightens at his approach. Can this tall, dignified man, with firm and resolute face, be the Roy of long ago? And, if so, why has Gladys never met him until now? But this is no time for such wonderings.

Together they watch beside the little one, as daylight fades and evening shadows fall across the old city. The small face is full of pain at first, but gradually it wears away and all is still, save for the distant murmur of the multitudes who throng the outer street, little heeding that angels are hovering in the twilight air.

"She is conscious to Someone above, though not to you," says Royland, to the weeping mother. "Do not fear; there is no dark river for children—only a brook, with easy stepping-stones. Lina will soon be in the Homeland."

And as he spoke the frail spirit passed away.

* * * * *

"Why did you never write to any of us, Roy?" asks Gladys, as they walk along Highbury Place, an hour later.

"Where was the use? Besides, Gladys, I didn't do altogether as you wished. I came to London, after being on the Continent for a few weeks, and continued my studies."

"You did? No; you cannot mean it. I should have seen your name somewhere."

"Hardly," rejoins Roy; "Uncle Kenneth wished me to take his name with the property."

"What! Are you the clever barrister, Kenneth, whom everyone is talking about?"

"The same," answers Roy, indifferently; "but we won't discuss such a 'dense' individual as myself."

Miss Charlton feels uncomfortable.

"Gladys, is something I heard to-day about you and Dr. Sternberg true?"

She thinks he refers to their quarrel, and answers:

"Yes."

All through that long summer night Gladys lies awake reviewing the past. Since she has discovered Hermann's true character she has been very wretched, and has looked upon her idol as shattered.

The gold had worn off with nearer acquaintance, the basis was dross. Surely this is not the case with Royland Kenneth. His life has only become truer and better with the world's "wear and tear." Gladys knows that he inspires her with a slight feeling of awe. His power is the greater now. He can stand a test.

As the weeks pass on, however, Mr. Kenneth and Dr. Charlton meet very seldom, and he grows more distant each time.

Gladys asks him the meaning of it once, and says she thinks that he means to retaliate and make fun of her, because she used to be thoughtless and conceited in her younger days.

"Cannot we ever be friends?" she pleads, as they part one evening at the house of a mutual friend.

But the answer is cold enough.

"Our lives are too widely separated now, Gladys. Besides, I am really so 'intensely provoking,' you know. I wonder that you care to ask such a question."

And then Roy turns away to assist a pretty girl, with whom the "people" say, he is greatly taken.

Poor Gladys! It is very hard. Why do things always go contrary? Why are the "tables turned," so to speak? Once Roy loved her, now he does not; but she cares for him.

Oh, dreary suspense! Why, if he loves this pretty Gwendoline Maynard, does he not marry her? And why is she, Gladys, doomed to see her friends grow faithless?

* * * * *

Another Spring comes round, and Dr. Charlton is at home. She looks weary and worn; but restlessly seeks all the dissipation which a country life affords.

There is a picnic to Marazion. Royland Kenneth is present, and tries to get near Gladys in the waggonette, but she avoids him; and when the rest all climb to the castle, intending to mount as high as "Arthur's Seat," she finds a cosy corner, halfway up St. Michael's, and; resting amongst the grass-grown rocks, considers herself free from intrusion.

Below her lies the little jetty, and a few cottages; then comes a stretch of blue-green water between the Mount and Marazion, while tiny steamers sail to and from Penzance.

Gladys is pondering over Hermann Sternberg's marriage. She had seen it announced the day before, and the bride was Gwendoline Maynard! She feels quite sorry for Roy, and yet——

Mr. Kenneth himself disturbs the reverie, as he had done some six or seven years previously, all amongst the apple-blossom. He refers to Hermann's marriage, and gently expresses his sorrow and sympathy.

"Why?" is the reply; "unless losing Gwendoline has made you more feeling for others?"

"I lose Gwen! What do you mean?"

"That I never really cared for Hermann," says Gladys.

"But you told me—that is, when I asked you——"

* * * * *

Once more they stand together by the brimming river, once more the dews fall and the mists rise over the sea; but this time two foolish folk have learnt to understand each other, and this time also the little birds peep over their nests and whisper: "See, those are happy lovers!"

But they must have found themselves in a practical world, after all, for, as their voices die away in the distance, we hear Gladys say:

"After all, Roy, you must have been 'terribly dense' not to have understood this before."

What was "this?"

* * * * *

The result of "this" was that Dr. Charlton sold her practice to another lady, and became Mrs. Kenneth.

They live in London, but go to Cornwall every other year to "sentimentalise" for a month, as Roy says.

R. Foxgrove.

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A Logical Query.

Edith: "I thought you and Mabel were fast friends." Nellie: "We used to be." "And you are not now?" "No." "What's his name?"

She Was Willing.

Gus: "If you don't give it to me at once I'll kiss you." Madge: "And if I do give it to you will you let me alone?" Gus: "Certainly." Madge: "Well, you can't have it."

Hubby Before Everything.

Hubby: "Yes, dear, you look nice in that dress; but it cost me a heap of money." Wife: "Freddie, dear, what do I care for money, when it is a question of pleasing you?"

True Love.

"Henry, you do not love me." "How can you say such a thing, when I've kissed you thirty times in ten minutes?" "If you really loved me you would not have counted the kisses."

Mercenary Papa.

"Did you tell papa how tender your love is for me, darling?" "I did, sweetheart, but he only laughed, and said that it was legal tender he wanted to see before we could do business."

Lost, Stolen, or Strayed?

Lena: "Fred didn't blow his brains out because you jilted him the other night; he immediately came and proposed to me." Maud: "Did he? Then he must have got rid of them in some other way."

A Cutting Rebuke.

Author: "And how do you like my novel?" Lady: "Oh, you ought to write in a more popular vein, so that even the ignorant can understand it!" Author: "What is there about it that isn't clear to you?"

Putting His Foot Into It.

Miss Highflier: "Oh, Mr. Sappy, how nice it was of you to name your new hunter after me! What is she like?" Young Sappy: "Well, she's a regular stunner, Miss Highflier. Not much to look at, don't-cher-know, but very fast." (And he cannot make out why she is so cool to him now.)

Under Certain Circumstances.

"Gertrude," he said, fixing his intense gaze upon her downcast brow, "would you object if I should pass my arm about your waist?" "Yes, George," she replied, gazing at his manly feet. "I should object, but I might yield to pressure."

A Hint to Employés.

Bob: "How do you stand with your employer so well, Tom; you never laugh at his jokes?" Tom: "No; but I dine at his restaurant, and, pretending not to see him, I re-tell all his stories, saying loudly, 'I can't tell it as well as he can, but here's a rattling good yarn Mr. Davidson told us this morning.' I've been promoted three times this year."

A Dead Certainty.

Friend: "Do you think you will marry a rich girl?" Poet: "I'll have to if I keep on in this business."

Asked and Answered.

Miss Rickets: "Why don't you marry Mr. Munn? Are your parents opposed to it?" Miss Giddy: "No; but Mr. Munn seems to be."

A Secret.

Maud: "Miriam is trying to keep her engagement a secret." Martha: "How do you know?" Maud: "She told me so."

Then He Did Feel Happy.

Mr. Waife (trying to entertain his lady-love's six-year-old sister): "Do you know who I am?" Flossie: "Yes! Papa says you're Edith's last chance."

He Assented Cordially.

Mrs. Wobbles: "I shall never forget, dear, how idiotic you looked when you proposed to me." Mr. Wobbles (with emphasis): "I was idiotic."

He Wasn't at Home.

He: "And did you see Monte Carlo while you were at Nice?" She: "No; papa called on him, I believe, but from his disappointed appearance when he returned to the hotel, I think Mr. Carlo must have been out."

A Little Encouragement.

"If I thought any girl would marry me," remarked Mr. Linger, "I'd propose to-morrow." "If that is how you feel," replied Miss Spokes, with a glance at the clock, which indicated 11:45, "you need not wait very long."

His Declaration.

Mrs. Rusher: "Has Mr. Goldcoin, with whom you have been dancing all the evening, at last declared his intentions, Mabel?" Mabel: "Yes, aunt." Mrs. Rusher: "I am so glad! And what did he say?" Mabel: "He declared he would never marry."

Comparisons Were Odious.

"Are your coats padded?" asked Angelina, as her head reposed gracefully on William's manly breast. "No. Why do you ask?" he inquired fondly. "Because they are so much softer than Martin's coats, or John's either, for that matter." The engagement is now off.

She'd Find Out.

"They say that stolen kisses are the sweetest," he said, as they sat on the seat looking at the moon. "Indeed?" she said. "Yes. What do you think about it?" "Oh, I have no opinion at all; but it seems to me, if I were a young man, I wouldn't be long in doubt as to whether they were or not."

One For Algy.

Algy (who is not as big a fool as he looks): "Did you give my cawd to Mith Bondclipper?" Servant: "Yes, sir." Algy: "What did she say?" Servant: "She told me to tell you, sir, that she was sorry she was not in." Algy: "Ah, indeed! Please tell your mithtress that I thaid I wath glad I didn't call."

A Lost Opportunity.

Mrs. Hunnemune (as the train emerges from a long tunnel): "Dear me, John, did you kiss me just now in the dark?" Mr. Hunnemune (glancing round to find the perpetrator of the outrage): "No, indeed! I wonder who dared to!" Mrs. Hunnemune (simply): "Nobody. But you missed a splendid chance, John."

The Sacrifice.

"George," said she, in a low voice, "would you make a sacrifice for my happiness?" "Certainly," he replied. "Would you give up smoking for my sake?" "Give up smoking for your sake!" he repeated. Then, after a silence, he exclaimed hoarsely, "I can refuse you nothing. I will do so. Hereafter when I smoke it will be for my own sake."

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A BROKEN DREAM.

Telling How a Goddess Suddenly Became Mortal.

"Look out, Fred! Have we toilers on foot no rights a plough-driver is bound to respect?"

"Good Heavens, Millie! Did I touch you? You seemed deeply absorbed gazing into the misty beyond."

"I was watching that brilliant equipage, so unlike the carts and hay waggons of these parts, and I see it has turned down our lane. Go to work, Fred, as I do, and don't dare pretend you are anything else but a toiling farm hand if they should stop to speak to you."

Mildred Avery pulled her blue sunbonnet over her face, and grasped her light pitchfork with energy. Her strong, graceful form seemed fully equal to her work of piling up the fragrant hay. Fred Lorimer, a young collegian home for his summer's holiday, a ward of Mildred's father, evidently thought she looked the picture of health, for even while industriously continuing his task, his eyes wandered constantly towards the fair young hay-maker.

Up the green lane a carriage, drawn by a fine pair of black horses, rolled noiselessly on until it stopped by Lorimer and Mildred Avery. Two handsome, stylish young fellows occupied it; one of them sprang out and approached the hedge. Mildred, apparently unconscious, as Fred wheeled the horse about on his return trip, stolidly pursued her work.

"Heigh! You girl, there!"

Mildred turned towards the young man.

"Well, sir?"

"Can you direct us to the house of Alfred Avery, somewhere in this vicinity?"

"Drive on to the end of the lane—you'll see the house then—a big white one in the middle of a lot of trees."

The young man was evidently surprised, for Mildred could not render her voice unmusical; he did not immediately turn away.

"Ah, thanks! We are very uncertain, you know. Glad to find ourselves so near our journey's end, you know."

Mildred worked on, making no answer. Her father, in his shirt sleeves, was at that moment balancing himself on the top of a load of hay at the other end of the field.

As the young man was hesitatingly moving away she called out:

"Do you want Mr. Avery?"

Perhaps this irritated the seeker after information, for he replied:

"Can't see that it concerns you, my pretty maid. But I don't mind telling you that we do want Mr. Avery, and perhaps his handsome daughter as well. So, fair maiden, are you satisfied?"

Before the astonished Mildred could think what to do, Fred had jumped from his seat and was striding fiercely towards the hedge.

"Look here, young fellow, you need to be taught manners. We don't speak to young ladies in that fashion in the country."

The man retreated from the advancing farmer in dismay.

"Dear me! What impetuous creatures these country boys are, to be sure! I assure you, I meant no harm. I beg the young person's pardon if what I said was disagreeable to her."

"Young lady, you mean!"

"Young lady—oh, very well, if she likes to be called so,"

"If she grants it you may count yourself lucky to get off without punishment. If not, I'll come and thrash you till she's satisfied."

"Oh, come, Gray," exclaimed the young man in the carriage; "don't get into a controversy with Squire Avery's farm hands—it wouldn't be policy, you know. Apologise as meekly as is necessary and come on."

"Sorry, I assure you—no offence meant—hope you'll excuse me," said Gray, backing before the gleaming eyes of the athletic harvester.

"Come back, Fred. It's all right," Mildred exclaimed in a strange smothered sort of voice, and Fred rejoined her as the carriage wheeled swiftly away. "I know them, Fred—at least, I know the one in the carriage," she said softly, with cheeks that were rosier than even the heat warranted.

"Oh, do you? And am I to apologise, then?"

"No—at least—I don't know how we shall meet them. It is Leo Maynard and his friend, Carroll Gray. I met Leo frequently when I was at my Aunt Margaret's in London last winter."

"Humph! And I suppose he has come out here to see you?"

Mildred made no reply. She stood with one hand on the handle of her fork, gazing dreamily towards the dim forest in the distance. She was thinking of the time she had last met Leo Maynard. It had been in a crowded ball-room, where the pulsations of an enchanting waltz, the fragrance of rich flowers, the soft glow of little lights, the graceful rhythmic motion of beautiful women and men around them, all combined to intoxicate the senses and make living seem a delicious enchantment. Nothing had seemed real in such a moment. She had felt herself the exquisite being Maynard's manner seemed to imply; he was a knight of olden time—romantic, mysterious, chivalrous—both were fascinated and under a spell; and since then to each the other existed only as the central star of a beautiful dream—real nowhere but in mthe emory. To-day they would meet again for the first time since that night.

"Fred, let's go home. We can slip in the back way, go to our rooms, and appear at the proper time, clothed and in our right minds. You see, we cannot send the servant down with a not-at-home message; having come so far, the traditions of the country demand that they be fed, entertained, and refreshed before they depart."

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Fred groaned.

"I don't fancy the prospect. Let's run away to the woods, and follow the brook to the coolest, greenest nook we can find, and pretend we never saw them. You know we are only Squire Avery's farm hands."

"You lazy fellow! You want to shirk your duties in either character. Come, call someone to take the horse, and let's get along."

It was high noon when Mildred descended the wide staircase of the roomy old farmhouse, dressed afresh in soft, creamy drapery, with a dash of colour about her head and neck, and half a dozen roses in her hand. Dark, soft waves of hair fell away from a broad white forehead, and a new animation glowed in her deep hazel eyes and well-rounded cheeks. She could hear the men from the hayfield laughing and joking with each other as they dashed the cool water over their moist faces; the savoury steam of substantial edibles floated through the rooms, and the clatter of dishes sounded from the long dining-room. The doors of the cool, spacious room stood open, and men's voices came to her from the room.

"Ah, here is my girl at last!" exclaimed Squire Avery, heartily. "Come in, Millie. I suppose you know one of these young gentlemen—ah!"

Both young men sprang to their feet, both had advanced to greet her. But Carroll Gray stopped in dismay, his face turning a mottled pattern of white and red.

"Bless my soul! It's the fair maiden herself!"

Leo Maynard turned pale.

"And I called you one of Squire Avery's farm hands!"

"Good gracious! What a dreadful mistake! Miss Avery—dear me—can you ever forgive me? No, I suppose you can't, you know. I—I—whatever is a fellow to say under such an awful combination of circumstances?"

Mildred laughed merrily.

"Say nothing. It was a very natural error. Mr. Maynard, I am glad to see you again. Mr. Gray, pray be seated. You are fully forgiven—Squire Avery's farm hands are not such very formidable people when you become accustomed to them."

Both men plunged again into a sea of abject apologies. A great clanging dinner bell clashed out noisily at the moment, and Mr. Avery recovered his usual genial tone.

"Heigho—dinner is ready. Millie, here, would not let us change our custom in haying time of eating altogether—saves time and work, you know, for people that are hurried to death. Come out—come and partake of a good, plain, old-fashioned dinner, served as farmers serve it." And the group, with the genial, prosperous farmer at the head, moved out to the dining-room.

A long table extended the length of the room, and a small throng of well-washed labourers were gathering round it. At the upper end the family were grouped, and here Mr. Avery led his visitors and introduced them to his wife and other members of the family. Carroll Gray sank into the abject sea again when he saw Lorimer, where he floundered hopelessly until Millie helped him out. They were all seated at last, presenting in modern guise a fair picture of ancient feudal customs. Two sturdy girls waited at the table, but Mrs. Avery and Mildred divided many duties between them.

It was all new and strange to Leo Maynard. He thought of dinners partaken under softly-masked electric lights, where rare flowers heaped up, and magnificent table furnishings, almost hid the guests from one another's view; where low delicious music from concealed players lulled the senses to a sweet quiet; where wine sparkled, and delicate perfume mingled with every breath; where noiseless servants moved about with skilful unobtrusiveness; where Mildred sat beside him in silken evening dress, rich flowers on her bosom and jewels in her hair and at her white throat; when she had seemed to him so fair, so exquisite a creature that all these had seemed too poor and plain for her.

And now—this homely meal in the glare of noonday, Mildred herself sitting down with a dozen dusty working men, and even administering to their greedy wants—what a contrast! How this goddess had become mortal in a moment! He had seen her, too, dressed as a servant and toiling like one. Where was all that delicate charm which had made her seem so unlike ordinary girls? His was not the nature to grasp the beauties of the practical, to appreciate the strength and helpfulness of this true woman. The magic spell, woven in hours of sensuous luxury once broken, he felt only affright and wondering dismay. He longed to get away from a scene the effect of which upon his senses he couldn't understand.

As soon as they reasonably could do so, the young men made their excuses and rose to go. Maynard's face was sad and dejected, and his lips refused to utter the suave, flattering words usually so ready to spring from them. He took Mildred's hand and looked into her grave, frank, brown eyes; but no tender tones, no plans for the future, no hopes for a brighter meeting were uttered by either. It was a simple, serious "Good-bye" over a broken charm, a faded dream, and both knew it was the last.

And years afterwards, when Mildred was the wife of the rising young lawyer and politician, Frederick Lorimer, Leo Maynard was a name forgotten in her memory, and unknown out in the great world of which she was an active part.

Stanley Hammond.

"Your friend, Mr. Barlow, isn't a very polite man. He was positively rude to me last night," said Maude. "That's Henry's great fault," said Ethel; "he has very little respect for age."

Tomlinson: "Good-bye, Miss Elenora." Miss Elenora: "But you have already said 'good-bye' to me, Mr. Tomlinson." Mr. Tomlinson (who is always ready with some pretty speech): "Have I, really? One can't do a pleasant thing too often, you know."

Jack: "I never kissed a girl in my life until I met you." May Ketchum: "I've heard that from others." Jack: "Who told you?" May Ketchum: "Ever so many; it's an awfully old lie."

"Well, old man," says artist number one, "how's business?" "Splendid!" says number two. "I've just got a commission from a millionaire. He wants his children painted very badly." "Good! I congratulate you, my boy. You're the very man for a job like that."

Son: "What is the meaning of a 'single' woman, dad? I've never heard of a 'double' one." Father: "A single woman, my boy, is one that has only a single idea in life, a single ambition, a single desire." Son: "And that is——" Father: "To get married."

ARE YOU GENEROUS? ARE YOU MEAN?

ARE YOU CLEVER? ARE YOU DULL?

Whatever you are it is as well to know other things concerning yourself, so send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will reach you in return—this will give you the required information.

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Not in Vain.

Telling of a Love that Passed Understanding.

Mr. Vaiden paced the room nervously. At each turn he glanced at the clock on the mantel, and many times he paused at one of the large windows, and, pushing aside the heavy crimson curtains, looked out anxiously into the white December night.

The cloth had been laid for a late supper, but the table had not been set. Evidently Mr. Vaiden was expecting a guest. When the clock's slender golden finger pointed to nine, he gave an impatient sigh and flung himself into an easy-chair before the glowing hearth. There was a large portrait of himself hanging above the richly-tiled mantel, but at this moment he did not resemble it in the least.

The portrait showed a man of probably forty years; with a kind and benevolent expression, earnest, gentle eyes, a white, high brow, with heavy, brownish hair waving away from it, and curling, brown moustache. It was the kind of face and the expression that belong to philanthropists and to men who unselfishly give up all they value in life for others.

The man sitting before the grate had the brown, waving hair and heavy, curling moustache, the white, blue-veined brow, but there was no trace of benevolence in his eyes or general expression.

Mr. Vaiden was alone, shut in by oaken doors and heavy curtains from the eyes of the world that adored him and trusted him, and his inner soul—his real self—looked out from his eyes.

"So," he said slowly, his lips showing bloodless beneath his moustache, "I have worked and schemed all these years for nothing, have I? I have played the public benefactor; I have crushed down all my own desires for a different, a freer life, just to mislead my brother into the belief that I was a saint, with the hope and trust that he would disinherit that roving young scamp and leave his millions to me! And all this for nothing, eh? Well, we shall see! The lawyer dead, one of the witnesses dead, and the other—but confound that Ratcliffe! I fear him as I fear nothing else on earth, man or monster! For there is always the girl. I dare not do anything that might arouse her suspicions, for I would lose all these thousands ten times over rather than lose her!"

There was a terrible passion in his face now.

"She is not his daughter, but the old man worships her; and, mean as he is to everyone else, he is good to her. So, because of her, I am afraid of him, and have to be careful—careful! I must bargain with him, instead of—silencing him. Oh, it is like walking over dynamite with a lighted torch in your hand! It is wearing me out, body and soul!"

He rose and paced the room again, one hand clasped with nervous force over the opposite wrist. His brow showed deep furrows now, and his temples beat fitfully. He looked old and haggard. Presently his eyes turned with the look of a desperate, half-crazed animal towards an old-fashioned desk in one corner of the room.

"If I only dared burn it!" he muttered. "Now—before he enters this house. But that old John Ratcliffe—I dare not—I dare not!"

There was a sound of wheels coming up the drive, and his expression changed instantly. He took several rapid turns to compose himself, and when his guest entered, five minutes later, he was received with outstretched hands by the original of the portrait—by the Mr. Vaiden of the gentle, earnest eyes that met yours so squarely, the Mr. Vaiden of the benevolent expression.

The guest was a young and handsome man. One saw at a glance that he was of a proud and passionate nature. There were passion and high spirit in his flashing, dark eyes, in the lines about his mouth, in his fine nostrils—aye, in every movement. Coming in out of the cold, his face was white, and there were flecks of snow on his clothing, but his eyes burnt like fire.

"My dear boy!" exclaimed the elder man, with affection, "you are welcome!"

"Uncle," replied the young man, coldly, giving, and immediately withdrawing his hand, "it would be an odd circumstance were I not welcome in this house."

"It would, indeed, Arthur," said Mr. Vaiden cordially. "Come to the fire, while I ring for supper. I have been waiting."

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," said the young man, "especially as I have dined on the train. And, uncle, if you can postpone your supper, I will detain you only a few minutes in this interview, as I wish to catch the next train back."

"What, Arthur! Do you mean that you will not be my guest?"

"I shall neither break bread nor sleep in this house until it is mine by law, as it is now by right."

There was silence for a moment. Then Mr. Vaiden said, in a tone of deep emotion:

"My dear boy, you grieve me to the heart. That you should feel hurt—aye, that you should feel bitter—that my brother should have left you only a hundred pounds, is to be expected. Were I in your place, I should feel the same. But I have sent for you for the sole purpose of making you what I consider a generous offer. My brother, out of charity, adopted you and treated you as a son, and I believe that he would have made you his heir, had not your course—your passion for wandering—displeased him. Heaven knows," his voice trembled with emotion, "so far as I am concerned, you were welcome to all his fortune and lands, for my wants are few. But, Arthur, he left his wishes in his will, and they must be respected."

"And your generous offer, most noble uncle?" said the young man, his lips curling in a fine scorn.

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"Arthur, I wish to make over to you—absolutely — twenty thousand pounds."

For a moment the younger man was speechless. Then he laughed; but almost instantly his face darkened, his nostrils swelled and his eyes fairly flamed. One hand closed convulsively, and he flung out the other in a violent gesture of unrepressed anger at his uncle.

"Now, listen!" he cried, in a tone that commanded obedience. "Your brother was my own father! He was separated from my mother—a poor Italian singing-girl — by you, because you wanted his money, and she died in wretched poverty and misery; but he loved her to the day of his death. Me he would not give up, although you did persuade him to disown me. I have seen his marriage certificate, and I believe that it still exists! I believe, too, that he meant for me to have all that he possessed, and that the will which gives it to you is your own forgery. You, sir, I believe to be a traitor, an impostor, and a forger! I am an open enemy. I accept no hospitality from any man in my own home, nor do I accept from you twenty thousand pounds of my own money. But this I will do. When my father's fortune is lawfully mine—as, sir, it will be—I will remember your offer and return your generosity. If you wish to confer with me at any time, you will find me up at the mountain village. I am staying for the present with Mr. John Ratcliffe, in the village——"

"What!" cried Mr. Vaiden, taken completely by surprise and turning deadly pale. "You are staying there—there? How did that happen? I—I had not heard."

"It was not necessary that you should. Sir, I wish you a very good night."

For a long time Mr. Vaiden stood with bent head in the centre of the room. But, when a train went rushing by, he walked to the window and watched it climb round the mountain-side above his home, and so on to the town of Bingley, a distance of half a mile.

"So he is staying there!" he muttered, with evil eyes. "If he should take her from me—so help me Heaven! I would stop at nothing!"

Suddenly the burly, black form of a signalman became visible, etched against the snow on the mountain-side and the red glow from his own fire. He had stepped aside for the train to pass, and was standing, evidently lost in thought, his pipe in his mouth, his flag under his arm, and his hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"Ah!—I have a thought——"

But the blackness of the thought made him shudder and drop the curtain, shutting out that figure.

* * * * *

The good people of the tiny Scottish village hanging under the brow of that rugged mountain had never ceased to puzzle over the domestic affairs of old John Ratcliffe. Why he, so much superior to them all in every respect, should have come to such a retired place, and dwelt there so many years with the beautiful girl whom he called Gertrude, all this was a mystery to the good folk.

Gertrude was the deepest mystery of all. She was not John's child, but that was all anyone knew. She was eighteen at the time my story begins, with the wild, strong beauty of a thorough-bred racer. Her hair and eyes were warm and black, her skin white as milk, but the rich blood glowed like wine in cheek and lip. Her throat was round and strong and beautiful; her well-formed arms and hands, her delicate nostrils, her superb figure—all had the same look of strength. She was like the winds and wild seas and lashing rains in her passions of delight or rage.

"She's not like our girls, Heaven be praised!" the simple villagers said. But Mr. Vaiden loved her, and had determined to move Heaven and earth to win her.

"When once she is mine and under my influence——" He thrilled in contemplation of the hour when she should be his.

Gertrude possessed a remarkable influence over old John Ractliffe, whose stubborn will no one else had ever been able to bend or break. Many a conflict had those two wills, the old one and the young one, had. The last and most violent of all had been when the old man was sitting on a bench in front of his pleasant cottage, smoking his long-stemmed pipe. Gertrude came out with a pitcher, on her way to the dairy to get cream for supper. She paused near him.

"I have taken a lodger," she said quietly.

"What?" almost shouted the old man. "I'll have no lodger in this house!"

"Oh, yes, you will," replied the girl. "He is already in the house. I have given him my room, and I'll sleep in the attic."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" roared the old man. "He shall not stay here!"

"He shall!" said Gertrude, with flaming eyes. "If I choose to do the cooking and extra work, it is nothing to you. I have told him he might stay—there is no accommodation in the village; he is in the house now, and if you dare to put him out"—she dropped her bare, lovely arms to her sides and looked steadily into his eyes, uttering each word slowly and distinctly—"I also shall leave the house in which I cannot be mistress!"

He knew she meant it. He smoked a moment, and then said, in a different tone:

"What is his name?".

"Arthur Vaiden."

He almost leapt off the bench, uttering a fierce ejaculation. Almost immediately, however, he composed himself, and gruffly bade the girl go on after the cream.

"So," he muttered, "the jade will have her will. But the uncle must not know he is here."

That was a month ago, and to-night the girl stood at the kitchen window, watching the head-light of the train that bore Arthur Vaiden back to his mountain refuge. It was midnight, and the old man had gone to bed; but the girl waited. She could not sleep while the train climbed the perilous mountain-road. There was a feverish crimson in her cheeks, and her eyes had the fire of a hungry animal's, as she watched the light growing nearer.

"He is coming back," she whispered—"he is coming back! Oh, Heaven, I don't know what to pray!" She fell on her knees on the bare floor and put her hands over her hot face. "Oh, Father, only be with him along that dangerous way!"

She knelt there, sobbing that simple but eloquent prayer over and over for an hour. Then the outer door opened suddenly. He came in, covered with snow. She leapt to her feet, but not so quickly but that he saw the attitude, the agitation, the tears. He went to her and took her hands warmly.

"Why, child," he said, "you have waited for me? Why did you do that?"

He stooped and kissed her forehead gently, respectfully; but, at touch of his lips, she burst into sudden convulsive sobbing. Taken by surprise, he drew her to his breast as he would a child.

"What is it?" he asked, laying her face against his and soothing her—aye, and feeling his own pulses beat more full and strong against the tumultuous throbbing of hers. She looked at him with those eager, beautiful eyes, leaning a little from him and yet clinging to him.

"What is it?" she repeated. "Did you think I could go to sleep while you were on that dangerous road?"

Was the road more dangerous than this sweet beating of

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his pulses ? the young man wondered vaguely, as he drew her closer to him.

"You must not worry about me, child," he said, awkwardly; "you—you must not care."

"Not care ?" she said, putting one white, strong arm up about his throat, and speaking with lips that curled like a crimson seashell. "Why, did you not know, if anything happened to you, or—or took you from me, I should not live !"

He turned very pale. He remembered a portrait upstairs in his trunk of a cold, proud woman, and a line that ran across beneath the face: "From your promised wife." He knew now that he had never loved her—that he had never been loved as this girl loved him, with all the passion of her warm, untrained nature. There comes a moment sometimes, to the strongest man, when his strength leaves him.

"She is like an opal," he thought, trembling a little; "she is gorgeous as the rainbow, and she loves me !"

He bent his head and laid his lips on hers in a long kiss, from which the girl at last broke away, her beautiful throat swelling with sobs born of the exalted ecstasy of her love.

"I love you !—love you !—love you !" she sobbed; and then fled away up the stairs to her attic, and, flinging herself face downwards across her white bed, lay there motionless some time.

Gertrude's love was so great and terrible a thing that it completely filled her soul, to the exclusion of all other passions. There was a wearing doubt in her mind that such happiness could last, so she prayed always that it might continue. If he kissed her, she ran from him, sobbing; if he went away, she paced her room for hours, pausing only to fall on her knees and stammer the prayers that struggled from her excited breast.

"It hurts—it hurts to love so !" she said, over and over again. "But I would not have it different; suffering for him is happiness."

And the month passed, and still she loved him dearly, and still she prayed.

One day, when he was away, his uncle came by the afternoon train and remained through the night. He attempted to press his suit with the girl, but she did not even understand him; and at last he gave up in disgust, and retired to the guest-chamber.

Gertrude went to her room, and, worn out with the feverish unrest of her love, fell asleep on the floor beside the low chair at which she was praying. She looked very beautiful in her dark red bodice and light skirt, with her arms bare to the elbows.

And in her sleep she beheld a vision. She saw Arthur Vaiden in a dimly-lighted room, which she recognised as his uncle's private study. He was standing before an old desk, fitting a key in the lock, quietly and boldly. The outlines of his figure stood out against a light screen behind him; his eyes were fixed full upon the door, as if prepared for any comer.

She awoke, shuddering. She seized her lamp and went to the door of his room. It was empty. She entered and set down the lamp. It was snowing, and there was a high wind; t beat at the doors with terrible force and rattled the casements. It was eleven o'clock.

"He has not come yet," she whispered, and fell on her knees to say a prayer for him. Something was lying on the floor, which he had dropped and forgotten to pick up; the portrait of a pale, cold woman, with "From your promised wife" traced beneath it.

It seemed but a few moments, but it was in reality an hour, that she knelt there motionless. Then she got up slowly, unconscious of her suffering, and set her sharp heel on the woman's face.

"The month is up ! The month is up !" she cried, running like a wild thing from the room. "And now to die—to die !"

She ran noiselessly, bare-headed and bare-armed, down the stairs, but paused at Mr. Vaiden's room. His door was ajar, and he and old John were talking in low, earnest tones.

Two Hours in a Cell.

"I WONDER how a fellow feels locked up in there ?" said the writer to the Governor of a big prison as we were peeping into a cell through the grated iron door.

"If you want a taste of it, I'll lock you up for a couple of hours," answered the Governor pleasantly.

"All right, go ahead !" I stepped inside and he locked the door with a clang, and left me. No sound, no view, nobody to talk to. I lay down on the iron cot and wondered when they would take me out and hang me; or whether I was likely to get a new trial. At the end of the second hour the Governor released me. "Had enough ?" he asked.

"Quite enough," I answered.

And yet I would rather take a month of that sort of thing than the long confinement Mr. George Robinson got—*in his house*, mind you—after the fashion he told of in a statement signed on August 24th, 1899, at his home, Rawcliffe, R.S.O., Yorks.

"I was laid up for *eleven weeks* with acute dyspepsia and the maladies that are part and parcel of it," he said. "The trouble began back in 1888. The first of it was just weakness, loss of appetite, and a low, miserable state of feeling. Then there was pain at the chest and stomach after eating—time when *well* people are at their best. After that I couldn't sleep of nights, except by naps and catches, when I got completely tired out. So the complaint went on, getting worse and worse, until I was laid up for eleven weeks. My doctors didn't seem able to relieve me for more than a day or so at a time.

"On a neighbour's word I tried Mother Seigel's Syrup, and *began to mend almost at once*. My breathing and appetite both improved, and in a few weeks I was in sound health."

It is five and a half years ago since Mr. Robinson made that declaration, and over fifteen years since he began to suffer, as he has described. On February 25th this year at his home, still at Rawcliffe, he made another declaration and signed it, in which he says to us: "Since I wrote to you, nearly five years ago, concerning my almost miraculous cure by Mother Seigel's Syrup, I am pleased to say that I have continued to enjoy good health. All the old weakness and depression are gone, seemingly for good, and I feel as strong and well as a man could wish to be. I had been prostrate eleven weeks when I got my first bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup. Several doctors had attended me, but I got no better until I commenced on Mother Seigel's Syrup. Almost from the first I began to mend, and in a few weeks was as well as ever. As I have said, my cure was almost miraculous."

Disease, and debility resulting from disease, are the cruellest of gaolers—they will never voluntarily release their victims. But let the prisoners cry out for help to Mother Seigel, and she will give them quick freedom from their toils, with health and strength into the bargain.

Indigestion and Dizziness.

Six Months' Suffering ended by

"Whatever I ate," says Mr. Morgans, of 2 Wellfield Terrace, Dola, Llanharran, Glam., "gave me terrible pain. Severe headaches and dizziness often compelled me to abandon my work. After suffering for six months without relief, I found my cure in Mother Seigel's Syrup. I have remained well and not lost a day's work since.

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"Let him break into the house like a thief, if that is his errand," Mr. Vaiden was saying, biting his nails nervously. "If we can depend on the train being wrecked, he will never reach the top of this mountain again. But I cannot believe that even he, bold as he is, would break into the house to look for the will. If I had thought that, John, I should have destroyed the will, in spite of your superstitions."

"Those that destroy wills," muttered the old man, shaking his head, "always seem to get found out. Better destroy trains. Where will it be?"

"At the curve. There is a precipice just where I tore up the line——"

The kitchen door creaked.

"It is the wind," said old John.

"Oh, Heaven, let me be in time—let me be in time!" cried the girl, as she sped through the cruel night towards the mountain-side. "Let me save him, even for her—and then let me die—only die!"

Her hair was streaming down her back, her head and arms were bare, her feet in slippers; but she felt nothing, cared for nothing.

Only to save him, and then to die! Those were the only thoughts in her mind. No anger with him, no reproach, no sense of personal wrong affected her. She had felt all the time that something must happen.

The girl had never loved anybody or anything before; therefore she was not to be judged. She was wholly untrained, uneducated. She knew every tree and rock on the mountain, every wild flower, every fern; she knew what the winds and the rains and the terrible storms said; she knew the music of the brooks; and, at a wild bird's first note, she knew whether it was nesting, singing to its young, or grieving for a lost mate. But she knew nothing of the world, and she had no creed beyond her simple prayers.

She knew a place on the mountain where a dangerous track wound down to the bottom of the valley where the railway ran. She sped to this place—to the very edge of the precipice. She grasped the limb of a tree and leant over—far over. Would she have time to descend that perilous path and stop the train? She would try; at least she would die trying to save him—for her!

Then, all in a second, as she hung over that brink, round a curve—close, close—burst the bright head-light of the approaching train. She flung out her free arm with a terrible cry. Merciful Heaven—the train! And the curve only a quarter of a mile beyond the place where she stood! Too late! too late! too late!

A thousand noises sung in her head, a thousand lights dazzled her vision, a thousand thoughts crashed through her brain. Then one thought took shape and stood out clear, distinct; at least, she could die with him. What! with him? No, no—for him. Her body on the line would stop the train.

"Oh, Heaven!" she cried—poor child, her last prayer—"let it not be in vain! Let me die, but save him—through me—for her! And, oh, forgive him, as I forgive him!"

Then, without one instant's hesitation, without one shrinking fear, she cast her beautiful young body out from the precipice, and it sunk like a spent arrow, down, down, through the midnight to the track below.

Arthur Vaiden was sitting half asleep, but with one hand on the pocket containing his father's will, as the train climbed the mountain. Some days before, an old and trusted servant of his father's had found, among some clothing willed to him by his late master, a sealed envelope, marked, "For my dear son, Arthur Vaiden." This he turned over to the young man, and it was found to contain a key and these feebly written lines:

"*This key opens right top drawer—old desk—study. My will and marriage certificate there. Leaves all to you. If ever a woman loves you as your mother loved me, be good to her. I am watched.* "Your Father."

Arthur Vaiden had made a bold move, and the will was his.

Suddenly came a succession of alarm cries from the engine, almost human-like in their distress and appeal. The sleepless eyes of the engine-driver had discerned a figure on the track. It was a close shave, but it was a steep up-grade, and he managed to stop the train within three feet of the girl.

"She has fallen from the cliff," those brave men said, turning pale as they bent over her.

She was not dead, but dying. She spoke his name with difficulty. The men passed it along wonderingly, and presently the crowd parted and he came to her, white as the death-white of her own poor face. A great and glorious light transfigured that face now.

"It was not too late," she said, slowly and faintly. "I have saved you—for her. You see, I found her portrait and knew all. I could not live then. I am so glad to die! Do not grieve—I forgive you! At least, I had one month of your love! If she loves you, she will not begrudge me that."

Then she struggled up.

"I forgot!" she cried. "He has torn up the line by the curve——"

In speechless grief the young man lifted her and laid her against his breast. Those beautiful eyes, dimmed by pain, were still able to thank him.

"You have been so good to me always," she whispered, "and I have had a whole month of your love. It was all I prayed for. I am satisfied."

He laid his face upon hers until Death came and took her into its own all-powerful arms.

"It is best," he said, with a strong sob, as he laid one last kiss on her lips. "I could never have married her, and, in either event, she would have died. A love like hers—so pure, so strong, so exalted, so unselfish—is more suited to an angel than to a woman."

Then his father's words came to him: "*If ever a woman loves you as your mother loved me, be good to her.*" He shuddered. "I was not good to her," he mused, deeply moved. "But no man can be good enough for a woman who loves like that. No man can even understand such love. She had the purity and the very strength of these wild cliffs in her nature. She was a very passion-flower of the mountain."

Edward Harris.

Mother (angrily): "Did he dare kiss you more than once?" Daughter (evasively): "Well, mamma, I know it wasn't less than once."

The Actress: "The manager seems to think that some day my voice will break the record." Jealous Rival: "Perhaps—if you sing in a phonograph."

Lottie: "I'm afraid Fred doesn't care for me as much as he did." Edith: "Nonsense! What makes you think so?" Lottie: "I got a letter from him to-day, and there were at least three places where he might have put in a 'dear' or a 'darling' and didn't."

"I don't care much for that man Blithersley," said the proud papa. "Why?" asked the proud mamma. "I listened to him for an hour to-day while he told me about what his baby had said, or tried to say, and just as I was about to tell him about ours he left me, saying he had to catch a train."

He (after popping the question): "Why do you cry, my angel? Did I offend you by my proposal?" She (still sobbing): "Oh, no, dear, it is not that. I am crying for joy. Mother always said to me, 'May, you are such an idiot that you would not get even a donkey for a lover,' and now I have got one after all."

Widow: "Do you think marriage is always a failure?" Bullfinch: "Always a failure! Well, I should say not. Why, I know a case where a wife fairly idolises her husband, and he—why he can't keep away from her a minute." Widow: "Bless me, how long have they been married?" Bullfinch: "Nearly a week.'

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Concerning the Trousseau.

No, "KITTY," the trousseau of a young lady about to be married does not include her household linen, knives and forks, antimacassars, and china, as you seem to think. The trousseau is a girl's personal equipment, those things which she requires for her own use, not for the household. At the same time, articles such as you mention are usually provided by a fond parent, though they do not come under the heading of "trousseau."

A Tact Trifle.

"HOSTESS" is at home two days during the month, and generally has a good many callers. She asks my advice as to how to tactfully get out of the following predicament: She is engaged in a very interesting conversation with one guest, when a fresh caller is announced. Should she leave off the conversation and devote herself to the new caller? While this would be strict etiquette, would it not be rather hard on the person with whom she was talking, to suddenly leave her?

* * * * *

I think a little tact would soon put the matter right. On the new guest arriving, "HOSTESS" should exchange a few well-chosen remarks, nice and to the point, should see that tea was given her, and, if possible, that she was left talking to some other guest, and then return, with an apology, to the guest with whom she was talking. To leave the latter for any length of time would be in bad taste, though only too many hostesses offend in this particular, out of supposed adherence to etiquette.

Teaching Him Manners.

"JESSIE" is in sad trouble. She recently met "FREDDIE," to whom she took a great fancy. This she told her friends. Now, "FREDDIE," though a very nice boy, has the very slightest knowledge of good manners. Whenever "JESSIE" meets him she bows very nicely, but "FREDDIE" never raises his hat. This has gone on for such a long time that "JESSIE" asks my advice as to how to convey to "FREDDIE" his proper duty when meeting a lady.

* * * * *

Let "JESSIE" go out with her brother, or cousin, or male friend, and when next they meet "FREDDIE," and she recognises him, let her request her escort to raise his hat in a very conspicuous way. If "FREDDIE" does not see from example what is the proper thing to do, then he must be lacking in intelligence as well as knowledge of good breeding, and would scarcely be a nice man for "JESSIE" to wish to cultivate.

A Lover Who Won't Write Love-Letters.

WHAT is to be done with a lover who will not write love-letters? This is the trouble of "BLUE EYES." "I have known mine for eighteen months," she writes, "but as he does not stay in the same town as I do, and his business at times takes him further away, we do not see much of each other. When he is away, he seldom writes to me, and sometimes a month has elapsed without any news of him. I have asked him about this, but he only says he has not much time, and does not like writing love-letters. He seems to love me very much, and is most affectionate and loving when we are together."

* * * * *

Many people, "BLUE EYES," dislike committing their thoughts and feelings to writing. In many cases, this is because they have not the gift. It is usually a good sign, as we know how often a love-letter is a mere essay in beautiful writing, meaning little or nothing. The most deliberate flirts write the best love-letters, and often write them to many different girls. You should take consolation in the hope that all your young man's best feelings are reserved to be poured into your ear alone.

Should He Break It Off?

"A. C. A." (Brighton) writes: "For two years I have been 'keeping company' with a young lady, and honestly I say that I really love her. For a fact, I know she also loves me, and regards me as her future husband. But my future prospects are so poor, that I cannot ask her to marry me. Shall I be doing wrong if I ask her to think no more of me, at least until such time as I shall be able to woo her again? Her parents and mine know of our engagement."

* * * * *

I do not see why you need break off the engagement. Surely, if she loves you and regards you as her future husband, she will not mind waiting until your prospects improve? In any case, tell her the whole truth about your prospects, and leave it to her to decide as she thinks best. If she wishes the engagement broken off because you are too poor, then you should do so, but not otherwise.

A Speechless Swain.

"I HAVE a very awkward affliction," writes "SOUTH AFRICAN." "I cannot keep up a conversation with ladies, and sometimes have to sit with 'my mouth stuffed with teeth,' as they call it out here, and listen. I cannot think of anything to talk about—that is to say, anything suitable to ladies' society. I am twenty-three, and have not been very much in ladies' society."

* * * * *

This is a very frequent complaint, and often affects people who are far from deficient in brains. I think it often arises from the mistaken idea that ladies expect a special brand of conversation served up to them, that the speaker must be always sparkling, or intense, or something unusual, and that unless one can shine in this way, one had better keep silent. It is not really the case. A lady likes the man in her society to talk in the way most natural to him. Little daily adventures, troubles, experiences, opinions, anything, so long as the speaker is natural, are liked. Sometimes, if the speaker cannot do anything better, he should not be ashamed to make a remark about the weather. Silly as it may seem, perhaps the lady will make some comment which will enable the gentleman to start an interesting story or discussion. I have known the most delightful conversations—sometimes blossoming into very intimate talks—spring from some such remark.

Cynthia

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Will be inserted in this column at the rate of 6d. per line of 8 words or part thereof. All advertisements should be addressed to Advertisement Manager, "Short Stories," 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., 11 days prior to date of appearance.

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